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Version: Version of Record

Link(s) to article on publisher's website:

<http://dx.doi.org/doi:10.21954/ou.ro.0000fcc4>

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The Treatment of Religion in Four Nineteenth-Century Novelists:

Mrs. Gaskell, George Eliot, Mrs. Oliphant and William Hale White.

By

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A Thesis offered for the Degree of Master of Philosophy
at the Open University. (Faculty of Arts: Literature)

JUNE, 1979.

Date of submission: 5-6-79

Date of award: 4-3-80

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1

The Treatment of Religion in Four Nineteenth Century Novelists:

Mrs. Gaskell, George Eliot, Mrs. Oliphant and William Hale White.

Summary

This thesis argues that the four novelists named in the title are distinctive among their contemporaries in the way they treat religion - both religious experience and the religious community. The novelists' own experience of religion gives them a particular awareness of the importance of religion in the personal life, and the religious life of their characters is rendered with both inwardness and respect. At the same time, the novelists' own commitments in religion can be seen as artistically important, exercising a decisive effect on the shape of the novels. There is also in these novelists a special interest in the social dimension of religion, and a concern to portray its social world. Also, the novelists are specially aware of change in the religious world, and offer - taken as a 'line' of writers - illuminating comment on the process of secularization.

The main argument of this thesis is illustrated in the second to fifth chapters by detailed discussions of the writers' religious backgrounds and of the novels. Mrs. Gaskell's deliberate commitment as a Christian novelist, and the effect of her Unitarianism on her writing, are discussed in relation to Mary Barton, Ruth, North and South and Cousin Phillis. George Eliot's early Evangelicalism and subsequent religious radicalism are seen as central to her early fiction, particularly Scenes of Clerical Life, Adam Bede and Silas Marner. Mrs. Oliphant's Chronicles of Carlingford are discussed in relation to the author's Christian commitment and sociological awareness; and the novels of William Hale White are seen as documents illustrating the psychological weaknesses of the English Puritan tradition and its inevitable social disintegration.

CHAPTER I

Introduction: Religion in the Nineteenth-Century Novel

Few, if any, Nineteenth Century novelists could avoid touching on religion, for their society was pervaded by its beliefs and practices.

As Owen Chadwick, the historian of the Victorian church, puts it:

Victorian England was religious. Its churches thrived and multiplied, its best minds brooded over divine metaphysical and argued about moral principle, its authors and painters and architects and poets seldom forgot that art and literature shadowed eternal truth or beauty, its legislators professed outward and often accepted inward allegiance to divine law, its men of empire ascribed national greatness to the providence of God....

Other historians echo the point. W.E.Houghton in The Victorian Frame of Mind notes that religion was "seen as essential if society were not to collapse";² for Kitson Clark religion is inseparable from "the making of Victorian England";³ and for Halevy its religion is the essential starting point for an understanding of Victorian society.⁴

The present thesis argues that the four novelists named in the title - Mrs. Gaskell, George Eliot, Mrs. Oliphant and William Hale White - are distinctive in their period in the way in which they treat this virtually unavoidable subject of religion. Whereas for other writers religion was an aspect of social manners, or a subject of controversy, for these novelists religion was central to the questions of individual identity and social community. It is for them less a matter of external systems of belief than an inward and personal experience which shapes the consciousness and which is nurtured in, and formed by, a community of faith. For each of these novelists, as I shall show later, religious faith was - or had once been - an important element in personal life, and this experience of religion as an inward and social reality gives them a particular imaginative awareness of the individual significance of religious feeling and motivation - an inwardness - which enables them to treat the religious experience of their characters with a distinctive seriousness. Their own religious background, however, also has a decisive effect on the way in which they present religion in their novels, often determining the kinds of fictional solutions which they

find acceptable; their own commitments in religion remain artistically important. Further, I shall hope to show that the novelists' treatment of religion is distinctive in its presentation of an authentic social world. They are close to the social context of religion, recognising the religious community - the place of shared belief and life - as a determining factor in the growth of an individual personality. In particular, this involves an openness to Dissent: these novelists do not share the Arnoldian disdain but accept the validity of the dissenting community, and are aware of the importance of locality in religion, of rootedness in specific place. Again, these novelists are distinctive, I shall argue, in their awareness of and rendering of the processes of change in the religious world. Taken individually, they offer insights into the dynamics of religious change; and taken as a 'line' of writers they present illuminating comment on the main, underlying movement in Victorian religion - the process of secularization.

In the following chapters I shall attempt to illustrate this argument through detailed studies of the four novelists, in which their religious backgrounds will be examined in relation to their novels. Mrs. Gaskell's commitment as a Christian novelist is discussed in relation to Mary Barton, Ruth, North and South and Cousin Phillis; George Eliot's early fiction is examined in the light of her experience of religion; Mrs. Oliphant's Chronicles of Carlingford are discussed in relation to the author's religious convictions and sociological awareness; and the novels of William Hale White are studied as explorations of the disintegrating Puritan tradition. This opening chapter offers a context for the following studies, looking - without claiming to be comprehensive - at some of the ways in which other novelists throughout the period in question deal with religion; and considering also the critical context for the present thesis and the concept of secularization.

One way in which several novelists touch on religion in our period is to consider the "faith and doubt" theme, where there is a clear intention to

explore the question of the possibility of religious belief. For the present thesis it will be useful to refer briefly to two such novels, one from each end of the period in question. Both J.A. Froude's The Nemesis of Faith (1849) and Mrs. Humphrey Ward's Robert Elsmere (1888) centre on religious doubt, but the differences in treatment remind us of the pace of religious change in the forty years that separate the novels. Sutherland's doubt in Nemesis of Faith is fundamentally moral, and is set in a context of pre-critical approaches to the Bible (though the effect of the publication of Marian Evans's translation of Strauss's Leben Jesu in 1846 was already felt in 1849.) Sutherland is morally offended by the Old Testament and by the Calvinist scheme of salvation - or damnation - which he feels is derived from it:

"I will not, I must not believe that the all-just, all-merciful, all-good God can be such a Being as I find him there (i.e. in the Old Testament) described..." 5

Particularly obnoxious is the idea of eternal torment, that

"... the largest portion of mankind, these very people who live about us, feel with us, act with us, are to be tortured for ever and ever in unspeakable agonies." 6

Froude's awareness of the specific context of belief in his own time is largely derived from his own religious involvement, but it had a wider applicability; T. Mozley records in his Reminiscences how a clergyman in about 1842 was accosted by two workmen in Fleet Street and taxed with the immorality of Joshua's treatment of the Canaanites, particularly the women and children: "What harm had they done?" 7 Sutherland's sense of religious nostalgia and regret is also worth noting - it is a theme picked up subsequently by other novelists:

"Oh, for one look of the blue sky, as it looked then when we called it Heaven! ... Whatever after evidence we may find, if we are so happy as to find any, to strengthen our religious convictions, it is down in childhood their roots are struck, and it is an old association that they feed The old family prayers the still, calm Sunday, with its best clothes and tiresome services, which we little thought were going so deep into our heart yes it is among these so trifling-seeming scenes ... that our faith has wound among

our heartstrings.⁸

Robert Elsmere suffers a not dissimilar conflict of intellect and emotion in Mrs. Ward's novel, and a continuity of theme is also detectable in the conscientious objections to orthodox faith made here: "For how much of the world's pain was Christianity itself not responsible?"⁹ But the novel is very much of the 1880's, reflecting closely the post-Darwinian, post-critical, idealist climate of the decade; specifically, the views of T.H. Green to whom the novel is dedicated. The notion of religious growth and development also separates the two novels; what for Froude was an impossible idea in 1849, that "the seeds of religion ... sown in ... childhood" should be "able to grow up freely",¹⁰ has in effect entered into common acceptance by 1888, when the religious climate has broadened and Temple's image (in his essay in Essays and Reviews)¹¹ of religious development is no longer startling. Mrs. Ward's novel is by any standards a far greater achievement than Froude's, of course, but both novels effectively illustrate a particular Victorian mode of treatment of religion.

A second mode of treatment is that in which the novel becomes the vehicle for the expression of religious protest or recommendation, where religion is not so much a matter of the quest for personal belief but more a matter of public controversy. Both Newman and Kingsley used the novel with this intention quite explicitly, but a more subtle and profound expression of religious views can be seen in Charlotte Bronte. Jane Eyre in 1847 contained a radical critique of the still predominant Evangelical religious ethos. Jane's struggle towards emancipation means her freeing herself from the shackles of repressive, fear-dominated, anti-life religion, symbolized in the "black marble" clergyman, Mr. Brocklehurst. St. John Rivers, similarly, stands for a version of religion which to Jane Eyre is like "a sentence pronounced

for doom";¹² and although the theme of the novel is not specifically religious, Charlotte Brontë's treatment effects a wholesale protest against negating forces in human relations of which Evangelical religion is identified as a major component. The link between religion, morality and social convention is made clear: all, for the author, share the destructive intention to curb individuality and spontaneity. In effect, then, Jane Eyre can be seen as a novel of unconventional religious protest. But in Shirley (1849) the author's radicalism is muted, and her conventionalism asserted in her superior and dismissive treatment of Barraclough and the Briar Lane Chapel. Again, this novel is not specifically religious in theme, but it reveals the author making incidental points of religious partisanship. Dissent, simply, is seen as ludicrous and contemptible:

Here followed an interval of clamorous prayer, accompanied by fearful groans. A shout of "I've found liberty!" "Dead o'Bill's has fun liberty!" rung from the Chapel, and out all the assembly brake again.¹³

The self-generated fervour of the service - "shouts, yells, ejaculations, frantic cries, agonized groans"¹⁴ - is in strong contrast to the cool and authoritative Helstone manner; and Briar Chapel is "large, new and raw",¹⁵ a further contrast to the solidity of Establishment represented by the parish church. Essentially, Charlotte Brontë cannot see Dissent as anything other than ridiculous, and her caricature in this novel amounts to simple propaganda; although a play of irony is evident in both directions in her account of the "battle of Royd Lane",¹⁶ the limited forces of Dissent are decisively overwhelmed by the multitudes of the Establishment. In Shirley, religious recommendation is unsubtle, lacking the profound symbolic force of the religious diagnosis in Jane Eyre.

In deliberately controversial writers like Newman and Kingsley, polemic tends to overcome artistic concern completely. Loss and Gain

(1848) contains some very bad writing on behalf of the Roman Catholic Church, the "mighty Mother", but nonetheless shows Newman attempting to explore questions of identity and relationship which are of concern to later writers. When, for instance, Reding discovers the friendship of Willis, there is an awareness of mutuality which is religiously important:

He perceived that he had found ... what he had ever wanted - a soul sympathetic with his own. He felt he was no longer alone in the world was this, he asked himself, the Communion of Saints? 7

- although it is ironic that having held out the idea of fellowship, Newman proceeds to first spiritualize, and then withdraw it entirely as, at the end of the novel Reding and Willis are forced to separate by Church discipline. In Kingsley's Yeast (1848/51) there is again much bad writing, directed this time against Catholicism, but there is also an exploration of some important issues fundamental to religion, notably the question of social relationships and the inter-relation of religion and politics:

It is most fearful, indeed, to think that these diseases should be confined to the poor ... while the rich by the mere fact of money are exempt from such curses, except when they come into contact with those whom they call on Sunday 'their brethren', and on week days 'the masses'. 18

Kingsley's idea of social fellowship is never, perhaps, effectively rendered in his novels, but it remains an important concern in Victorian religion. Even the apparently unpromising treatment of religion in controversial style could be fruitful.

Dickens's treatment of the religious world is distinct in its dismissiveness. From Pickwick (1836/7) onwards, there is a characteristic reaction of blunt, commonsense scorn towards the existence - what appears in the novels as the affectation - of religious conviction or fervour. Dismissal is effected by caricature and ridicule, and the method - and the stereotype - are consistently on

the "Pickwick" pattern. Stiggins is an early but decisive figure for Dickens's treatment of religion; religious profession is associated with self-indulgent appetite (Stiggins's red nose being a constant reminder of his excessive consumption of hot pineapple rum-and-water) and with hypocrisy. Dickens is unable to take seriously the social world of the chapel, its tea-meetings, its connection with religious-philanthropic enterprise: the work of the United Grand Junction Ebenezer Temperance Association is no less absurd than the attempt to provide "the infant negroes in the West Indies with flannel waistcoats and moral pocket handkerchiefs."¹⁹ And yet Dickens is concerned not to alienate the reading public; he carefully notes his concern and respect for "large bodies of virtuous and well-conducted persons of many excellent sects and persuasions"²⁰ - almost as if he is conscious that his caricature of religious life may be offensive. The gesture, however, is perfunctory, and sixteen years later substantially the same stereotypes reappear in Bleak House (1852/3). Chadband is a far more fully-realized comic study than Stiggins, but shares his overindulgence and his canting hypocrisy; similarly, Mrs. Jellyby's work on behalf of the people of Borrioboola-Gha, her "telescopic philanthropy", is a more developed version of the "infant negroes" motif. Yet there is a far greater seriousness about the treatment here of some religious questions. One of the novel's main themes is social fellowship, and Dickens is making a profound social and religious point in Chapter II as "they bring our dear brother here departed, to receive Christian burial"; the irony effectively opens the notion of "brotherhood" for fictional exploration in the rest of the novel, and the word "Christian" is similarly tested against social reality. A disturbing critique of national religion is developed through Dickens's treatment of Jo, constantly made to 'move on', and alienated from society's religion as much as from its care:

And there he sits, munching and gnawing, and looking up at

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the great cross on the summit of St. Paul's Cathedral,
glittering above a red and violet-tinted cloud of smoke.
From the boy's face one might suppose that sacred
emblem to be, in his eyes, the crowning confusion of the
great, confused city; so golden, so high up, so far out
of his reach 21

Bleak House, that is, offers a radical consideration of the
interrelation of religious profession and social fact, a consideration
which can fairly be described as religious protest. Yet this
coexists in the novel with a crude stereotyping of the religious world.

The continuity of Dickens's dismissiveness can be illustrated
further in "Hard Times" (1854), where religion shares in the moral
-aesthetic revulsion the author feels for Coketown:

If the members of a religious persuasion built a chapel
there - as the members of eighteen religious persuasions had
done - they made it a pious warehouse of red brick, with
sometimes (but this is only in highly ornamented examples)
a bell in a birdcage on the top of it ... the perplexing
mystery of the place was, who belonged to the eighteen
denominations 22

Dickens remained unable to take seriously the social reality of
religious life, particularly of dissenting life; and shared the
contempt of his character George Silverman for religious brotherhood:

... the knowledge became forced upon me, that, outside their
place of meeting, these brothers and sisters were no better
than the rest of the human family, but on the whole were, to
put the case mildly, as bad as most, in respect of giving
short weight in their shops, and not speaking the truth ... 23

His treatment of religion touches profound questions, but denies
the felt reality of the religious world.

Trollope's treatment of religion, like that of Dickens, deserves
comment in its own right. The Barchinshire novels began from a
perception of ecclesiastical corruption, as Trollope himself noted;
he refers to the "evil" of "the possession by the Church of certain
funds and endowments which had been intended for charitable purposes,
but which had been allowed to become incomes for idle church dignitaries." 24

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But having begun from a moral protest - admittedly a slight and superficial one compared with that of Charlotte Bronte in Jane Eyre or of Dickens in Bleak House - the novel series continues simply to use the ecclesiastical-pastoral world of Barchester as a milieu for conventional tales of romantic love and domestic fortune. Despite appearances, that is, Trollope is not really interested in religion at all; not, at any rate, in so far as it motivates action, controls consciousness, provides a context of shared belief making for a sense of identity. Religion as a personal or social reality scarcely appears in Barchester or its county.

This is not to suggest that the novels have nothing to say about ecclesiastical institutions, or that they are unaware of contemporary religious problems. The Warden (1855) came twenty years after Peel had set up his reforming ecclesiastical commission, but even in 1860 the Church of England still had what Owen Chadwick calls its "ecclesiastical lumber", its "endowed corruption":²⁵ the reforming zeal of John Bold is by no means a religious irrelevance. And there is an effective portrait, in Grantly, of ecclesiastical arrogance:

As the Archdeacon stood up to make his speech, erect in the middle of that little square, he looked like an ecclesiastical statue placed there as a fitting impersonation of the church militant here on earth one hand ensconced within his pocket evinced the practical hold which our mother church keeps on her temporal possessions; and the other, loose for action, was ready to fight if need be in her defence; and below these, the decorous breeches, and neat black gaiters showing so admirably that well-turned leg, betokened the stability, the decency, the outward beauty and grace of our church establishment. 26

Trollope's irony has a strong moral force here which is oddly out of harmony with the moral repose, even complacency, of the later Barchester novels. The implications, as it were, of Archdeacon Grantly are never explored, and Trollope offers little in the way of religious insight; when, as in Crawley, he attempts to portray a man under the pressure of inner religious feeling, the result is unsuccessful: and his most memorable portraits are either malicious - as in Slope - or idealized - as in Harding, than whom no-one knew "a sweeter gentleman or a better

Christian".²⁷ Trollope's disability is essentially that he has no inwardness towards religion; as he himself revealingly remarked:

...I have endeavoured to portray (clergymen) as they bear on our social life rather than to describe the mode and working of their professional careers ... 28

His clergymen remain ecclesiastical members of society; for despite his apparent concern with religion, Trollope is in a profound way unaware of the inner religious impulses.

Thackeray, too, while offering an astute and at times withering commentary on religious manners, observes religion essentially from the outside. Vanity Fair (1848) works through a relentlessly ironic exposure of social shams - among which is the affectation of religious belief and behaviour. From the opening scene Thackeray presents religion as one of the facades behind which more egotistic instincts lurk; Becky Sharp's career of ruthless self-interest ends in social-cum-religious respectability in Bath and Cheltenham, where her piety is amply demonstrated in her contributions to charitable causes. This ironic stance is predominant throughout, and when Thackeray moves towards narrating genuinely inward religious experiences - Amelia's prayer on her return to her parental home (ch.26) is an instance - he swiftly draws away from this "secret" area into the one where he is most at home. In a fashion not dissimilar to that of Dickens, Thackeray's Vanity Fair exposes religious pretence and conveys a sense of the author's scepticism about most aspects of the religious world.

The novelists studied in the following chapters, therefore, work in a context in which religion, in one guise or another, is inevitably of concern to their fellow writers. Their distinctiveness lies in their treatment of religion as a question of human and fictional centrality.

Critical interest in the treatment of religion in the Victorian novel was signalled by Walter Pater in 1888, reviewing Robert Elsmere:

Who will deny that to trace the influence of religion upon human character is one of the legitimate functions of the novel ? 29

- but it was not until 1932 that a critical study of religion in the novel

appeared, in J.E. Baker's The Novel and the Oxford Movement. Much of his attention is given to little known writers whose interest for him is not primarily artistic, but dictated by the fact that they do "reflect the Oxford movement"³⁰ in their reference to theological controversy or clerical manners. However, Baker writes astutely about Trollope, noting that in his portrait of clerical life "there is almost no religion", and that the church appears as "a bureau of state" whose "ministers are like civil service officials translated into clergymen".³¹ The value of Baker's study is limited by the way the writer sees the earlier, controversial novels leading to the culmination of John Inglesant, which he regards not only as "the greatest Anglo-Catholic novel of the Victorian age" but also as "the nearest approach in English to a religious novel of universal significance."³² The whole direction of Baker's study, his notion of the development of method in the treatment of religion, is controlled by this valuation, which would now be difficult to uphold.

Basil Willey, in his More Nineteenth Century Studies of 1956, considers the treatment of religion in some novelists and others from the point of view of the "loss of faith" which he takes as his central theme. F.W. Newman and J.A. Froude are considered, and there is an interesting study of "Mark Rutherford" which, however, makes probably too little of the distinction between William Hale White and his Rutherford persona. Willey's interest is mainly in the intellectual movements of the mid-and-late Victorian periods, in "the reinterpretation of current orthodoxy in the light of nineteenth-century canons of historical and scientific criticism",³³ and the novels he considers are taken more as documents in intellectual history than as novels.

Margaret Maison's Search your soul, Eustace (1961) is subtitled "A survey of the religious novel in the Victorian age" and offers brief and uncritical attention to a large number of novels. The book has

some value as a historical survey, but attempts no definition of the "religious novel" and is generally unpenetrating critically. Its main impact, perhaps, is simply as a reminder of the extent to which the Victorian novel was concerned in one way or another with religion. Maisson argues that:

... the novel was used by (the Victorians) more than any other form of art to portray the religious movements of their time, to be a vehicle for all manner of theological and ecclesiastical propaganda, to conduct debates and controversies, and to tell the world of their doubts and conflicts, their spiritual travels and phases of faith. ³⁴

H.C. Knoepfmacher in his Religious Humanism and the Victorian Novel (1965) offers a far more detailed and discriminating account of the way in which three novelists, George Eliot, Walter Pater and Samuel Butler, attempt to present "the influence of religion upon human character" without abandoning what he calls "the aesthetic function". ³⁵ Knoepfmacher argues that for the novelists in question the novel itself was seen as the art form in which they could "fashion a creed in accord with the new evolutionary world that they were faced with"; ³⁶ and he offers critical readings of the novels which attempt to demonstrate his thesis. The study is particularly valuable for its commentary on George Eliot but offers little consideration of the religious world as she presents it, concentrating more on the novelist's attempt to embody a moral creed in her fiction.

The most useful recent study in the area is Valentine Cunningham's Everywhere Spoken Against - Dissent in the Victorian Novel (1975). This is a comprehensive treatment of its subject, but is weakened throughout by Cunningham's insistence that the Victorian novelists are 'unfair' in their treatment of Dissent; while there is a great deal of truth in the general observation, Cunningham's emphasis is over-insistent, and the study loses force by the writer's over-conscious championing of a cause. Despite this, however, he offers valuable sections on Dissent and Dissenting disadvantage, arguing to effect

that the novel's failure of openness towards Dissent is "an analogue of the social and political disabilities Dissenters were forced to suffer."³⁷ Cunningham's book provides valuable material for an understanding of the context of the Victorian novel which treats Dissent, but his precise critical judgements are less happy. He is too concerned to "check up on" the novelists, carrying with him a notion of fictional "accuracy" which is not far removed from the original-hunting which, in relation to George Eliot, G.H. Lewes deprecated as being "false in fact and tending to perpetuate false notions about art."³⁸

In Gains and Losses (1977) Robert Lee Wolff, the American historian, provides a survey of "Victorian novels of religion" which is intended to form an introduction to the Garland series of Victorian reprints. There is a valuable recognition that "... almost all Victorian novels - even those dealing primarily with far different subjects - touch upon religious matters";³⁹ but the book offers not much more than a more weighty consideration than Margaret Maison's of the literary history of religion in Victorian fiction. Wolff uses much the same form of structure as Maison, dealing with "religious novels" chronologically under headings which define their religious provenance, and his summarized accounts of large numbers of novels are historically informative but critically unimpressive. His own critical standpoint is, perhaps, sufficiently indicated by his remark (on Robert Elsmere),

"... we have often been willing here to ignore the literary distinction of our novels, emphasizing instead ... their historic significance ..."

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Most recently, Donald Davie, in his A Gathered Church - the literature of the English Dissenting interest 1700-1930 (1978) has considered Dissenting writers and their achievements in the light of what he identifies as a characteristically^{sti} Puritan aesthetic of "simplicity, sobriety and measure".⁴¹ Davie offers useful comment on Mrs. Gaskell and Mark Rutherford arguing of Rutherford that "no

English writer is more important if we are looking for what Dissent has been in English Culture", ⁴² and his book is a valuable addition to what is not an extensive bibliography.

One further comment on the critical context for the four selected novelists may be valuable, that is, that comparatively little attention seems to have been paid by critics to the novelists' treatment of the religious world. In the case of Mrs. Gaskell, studies from Edgar Wright's Mrs. Gaskell: the basis for reassessment (1965) onwards have necessarily dwelt on the importance of religion in her life, but have concentrated more on her treatment of the social and industrial world. George Eliot is the subject of a large and increasing body of critical work, and again critics have commented extensively on her religious background without, perhaps, giving serious enough attention to her portrayal of religion in the earlier fiction; B.J. Paris's Experiments in Life (1965) may be cited as an example of a study which looks at George Eliot's religious development in some detail and attempts to relate this to her fiction without a detailed discussion of her treatment of the religious world. There is, it may be said, a virtual critical vacuum as far as Mrs. Oliphant is concerned. Despite the critical biography The Equivocal Virtue by V. and R.A. Colby (1966), there has been little obvious attention paid to her as a novelist, apart from that offered by Q.D. Leavis by way of introduction to reprintings of Miss Marjoribanks (1969) and the Autobiography and Letters (1974). There is far more extensive work on W. Hale White, much of which considers the impact of religious experience on the novels, as, for instance does W. Stone's Religion and Art of Mark Rutherford (1954); but there is a tendency to see both the earlier novels as personal testimony or slanted documentary rather than as art. The present thesis, therefore, is an attempt to study the selected novelists from a slightly unfamiliar viewpoint, and it does not, as a result, offer a

more detailed critical bibliography than the outline just completed.

It may, however, be useful briefly to note that the theme of change has been of recent interest to critics. F.R. Leavis referred to the novelists of the nineteenth century as "incomparable social historians",⁴³ a comment elaborated by Ian Robinson in The Survival of English (1973):

How is our world changing? they ask, and their novels answer the question in the way proper to fiction. Criticism of life became an attempt to see, as well as be, "the age" ...⁴⁴

The perception that the novelists both evaluate and render the processes of change is also at the basis of Tradition and Tolerance in Nineteenth Century Fiction (1966) by Howard, Goode and Lucas; and John Lucas has developed the theme in his recent The Literature of Change (1977). These critical insights into the relation between Victorian novels and the changing society from which they emerge have been of value to the present thesis, particularly as it attempts to view the changing religious world of the era and the process of secularization.

At one level, religious change in the Victorian era can be gauged by the extent of church building. Owen Chadwick points out that

The Victorians covered industrial England and its suburbs with churches and chapels. Wherever the population spread they succeeded in putting a spire or a church room within easy reach.⁴⁵

E.R. Wickham, in his study of Sheffield, Church and People in an Industrial City, has followed the process of church and chapel building in detail, and the figures for expansion are remarkable, particularly for some of the nonconformist bodies; the Primitive Methodists, for instance, from one building in 1855, grew to 32 in 1897.⁴⁶ The Sheffield survey of 1881, he adds, shows that the total number of attendances had doubled since the religious census of 1851, exactly in line with a doubling of the city population; the churches, that is, had kept up

with a growing population.⁴⁷ This outward success and expansion of the Victorian religious world is further described by Kitson Clark in terms of church building across the nation as a whole; a return of 1876 showed 7,144 churches restored and 1,727 built since 1840, with an expenditure of £25,548,703: by any standards a massive financial effort. A further index of growth is the number of clergy, which expanded steadily from 17,320 in 1851 to 21,663 in 1881, and the growing number of theological colleges - eight were founded between 1836 and 1876.⁴⁸ Kitson Clark also notes, in An Expanding Society: Britain 1830-1900, that the era commonly thought of as characterized by "Doubt" - 1859 to 1871 - is precisely that of the great religious revivals, when popular religion and religious emotion were growing, not declining. The extent to which hymns had entered the popular imagination by the end of the century might also be seen as a sign of religious progress.⁴⁹

Despite this impression of religious growth, however, there are other indications which point to a more profound lack of success. The religious census of 1851 showed not so much that half of the population attended church, but rather that half didn't: it was, as G.F.A. Best points out, a humiliating discovery, by Victorian standards.⁵⁰ Further, as Wickham notes, despite the enormous building and evangelistic efforts of the second half of the century, the absolute numbers of those who did not attend church increased with the population; if the churches had "kept up", so had the numbers of non-attenders. And the non-attenders, furthermore, "substantially ... comprised the entire working class."⁵¹ Victorian religion, that is, remained largely a middle-class affair, as K.S. Inglis emphasizes:

.... the mission of English Christianity to the urban working classes was treated between 1850 and 1900 as an urgent question. It was generally agreed that a majority in these classes attended no place of worship in 1850, and that at least as high a proportion stayed away at the end

of the century despite all the efforts made to win them. ⁵²

The Victorian religious world, therefore, was characterized by change at the simple level of numbers; a great expansion in buildings and attendances continued into the 1880's when a decline in numbers began to be noted. But figures of numerical expansion hide a more profound lack of success; the end of the century found religion still out of touch with at least half the population, with its social influence on the wane. ⁵³ It is this social decline of religion, matched by an inner decline of conviction, which is frequently referred to as secularization, a process which some historians see as essentially characteristic of the Victorian religious world. Chadwick, for instance, commenting on the beginning and end of the era, notes that in 1901, "England as a whole was more 'secular' in atmosphere" ⁵⁴ than in 1837; but he makes clear his reservations about the term 'secular':

The difficulty is to form any precise idea of what is meant by the imprecise word. That it represents truth is hardly to be doubted, but what truth is not so easy to define. ⁵⁵

Chadwick's own later The Secularization of the European Mind in the Nineteenth Century (1975) may be seen as an attempt to offer a definition of "secularization", or at least to discuss some of the elements in a complex term; but it is well to note that some sociologists despair of the term altogether. Whereas B.R. Wilson, in Religion in Secular Society, feels able to offer a clear definition - "the process whereby religious thinking, practice and institutions ⁵⁶ lose social significance" - Susan Budd has argued that "its meaning has become so diffuse as to obscure rather than clarify", ⁵⁷ and David Martin insists that since the term "secularization" is a "tool of counter-religious ideologies", it should be "erased from the sociological dictionary". ⁵⁸ The reservations of these sociologists point to the danger of using the term indiscriminately, of seeing a process of

decline from a golden age of faith or of advance to an era of enlightenment; nevertheless, the present thesis accepts, with Chadwick, that change in the Victorian religious world is fundamentally a process of decline, or secularization, in which the social and personal impact of religion is in recession. This is difficult to illustrate with precision, indeed, it is far more a matter of perceptions than of external facts - the area of the novelist rather than of the historian. But it will be valuable to attempt to outline some aspects of, and contributory factors to, the secularization process in order to provide a context for the discussion of the novelists' perception and rendering of religious change.

One major aspect of secularization is the general drift throughout the period in question away from authoritarian systems of thought and towards the notion of an open, liberal world in which individual minds have free play. Chadwick cites the J.S. Mill of On Liberty as exemplifying - even championing - this tendency,⁵⁹ but it was noted by religious thinkers also. Frederick Temple's essay The Education of the World explores the "lesson of toleration" which the church had to learn following the Reformation, a lesson he describes as "not yet fully learnt".⁶⁰ But, he argues, despite occasional reversions to authoritarian patterns - Temple mentions Roman Catholicism, and John Tulloch later cited the Oxford Movement - the drift is clear:

There are occasions when the spiritual anarchy which has necessarily followed the Reformation threatens for a moment to bring back some temporary bondage, like the Roman Catholic system. But on the whole the steady progress of toleration is unmistakable. The mature mind of our race is beginning to modify and soften the hardness and severity of the principles which its early manhood had elevated into immutable statements of truth. Men are beginning to take a wider view than they did⁶¹

Temple, of course, both accepted and argued for a changing, liberalizing Christianity, as did Tulloch. J.H. Newman saw

Christianity as incompatible with change, having to stand against it; his often-quoted remark that it is "clear as day that Protestantism leads to infidelity"⁶² indicates the conservative anxiety which took him to Rome. And, oddly, F.W. Newman made a similar diagnosis in his essay The Religious Weakness of Protestantism. By accepting reason, argues F.W. Newman, Protestantism undermines itself; it contains the seeds of its own destruction:

... it does not tell people, like Catholicism, that they must not reason at all concerning religion. On the contrary it excites their reasoning powers - bids them examine - professes to give proof - lays before them the scripture as decisive - talks high of private judgement - and yet gives no evidence which can bear the tests of ordinary historical and scientific enquiry. ⁶³

For a variety of religious thinkers, therefore, the trend of the age towards individual judgement, 'toleration', was clear; they were divided not in perception but in response. The Victorian religious world had to encounter intellectual change as an aspect of the changing era.

A second aspect of the secularization process may be seen in the impact of rational and individualistic critical thought on belief, what sociologists have referred to as demystification. B.R. Wilson points out that "it has become increasingly difficult to maintain a limited rationalism";⁶⁴ that the acceptance of rational thought in one area leads to its predominance in others. Certainly the Victorians were aware of this; they record frequently and painfully the undermining of belief, of emotional religious experience, by rational analysis. Marian Evans's⁶⁵ description of herself as "Strauss-sick" reveals the conflict of emotional attachment and critical analysis; and a review of Renan's Life of Jesus in the British and Foreign Evangelical Review explicitly describes - and recoils from - the spread of critical method; Renan "analyses and dissects what we have been accustomed to reverence and adore."⁶⁶ Renan himself commented on demystification:

"Whether one is pleased or not, the supernatural is disappearing from the world; only people not of this age have faith in it? 61

- and the historian's perception of a changing consciousness recalls Comte's notion of what G.H. Lewes called "the fundamental law of mental evolution":⁶⁸ that the supernatural and metaphysical stages of knowledge have been superseded by the positive. Comte's dominance of the philosophical thought of the mid-Victorian age is a token of the power of rational, even anti-religious, analysis; yet Comte, interestingly, developed his "religion of humanity" to provide for the non-rational aspects of human character. It is a further illustration of the age's awareness of - and anxiety about - a changing intellectual climate in which critical analysis was seen to be encroaching on formerly "sacred" areas. Secularization involves a shrinking of the sacred, and a troubling of those areas of experience and emotion most closely associated with it.

A third aspect of the secularization process is the steady advance of science throughout the period. Halévy sees this as the central feature of the modern world - an advance in science matched by a retreat in religion:

The conflict between the Christian tradition on the one hand and the progress of science on the other is undoubtedly the outstanding feature of the intellectual and spiritual history of the West in modern times. Religion no longer asserts her truth as something to be taken for granted. She pleads her cause before a hostile tribunal. 69

In a less comprehensive phrase, but equally firmly, Susan Budd argues that "religion has been replaced by science as the organizer and judge of knowledge for society";⁷⁰ and it was the Victorian religious world which experienced the unsettlement of this replacement. Specifically, the work of Lyell, Chambers and Darwin offered, as A.R. Vidler insists, a "sensational challenge to belief."⁷¹ The effects of this challenge on the Victorian literary imagination are clear:

Tenneyson, for instance, expresses the shock of realizing the world not as a solid and secure, but as a shifting and uncertain setting for human life:

There rolls the deep where grew the tree,
O earth, what changes hast thou seen!
There where the long street roars hath been
The stillness of the central sea. 72

- and the whole of In Memoriam conveys forcefully the uncertainties and evasions of an age troubled emotionally by changing intellectual and scientific outlooks. But the effects of "science" on the popular imagination are less clear. While Darwin may be seen as a symbol of the Science-Religion conflict, argues Chadwick, the secularizing force was not Darwin himself or his writing:

So far as can at present be discerned, Darwin and Darwinism had no direct influence whatever in the secularization of the British working man. 73

Far more influential than Darwin, Chadwick continues, was the controversy; not the science but the argument. And he asserts that

The general public was overwhelmingly in favour of religion, considered vaguely, rather than against it. 74

Here, we are in difficulty with the term secularization; Chadwick offers a reminder that a view of science displacing religion may be over-simple - and suggests that the process should be seen more tentatively than historians such as Halevy would allow:

So indefinable a change may be described, provisionally, as an extension of the area of intellectual agnosticism within the realm of religion, even for religious men, especially for religious men. 75

The religious world - so much is clear - was challenged by an outlook which called in question some of its most profound commitments; and it became no easier, as the age continued, for an individual or a group to hold a simple and untroubled faith.

The attitudes and habits of the churches themselves may be seen as a contributory factor to the secularizing movement. Just as the ecclesiastical establishment rounded on Darwin with outraged horror, so it displayed an equal - if not fiercer - inflexibility of outlook towards those within the churches who were attempting to argue for the acceptance of change in theology. Orthodoxy characterized itself as repressive and arrogant: Bishop Wilberforce, for instance, here rounding on his clerical colleagues who had written Essays and Reviews:

... these difficulties gather their strength from a spirit of lawless rejection of all authority, from a daring claim for the unassisted human intellect to be able to discover, measure, and explain all things. The rejection of the faith has now robed itself in more decent garments, and exhibits to the world the old deceit with far more comely features 76

And the self-defensive, rejecting impulse, predominantly negative towards all ideas of change, reflected itself in the expulsions, in their different contexts, of F.D. Maurice and the young theological student William Hale White. The churches could be seen to stand not for love and tolerance but for exclusiveness and negation: Charlotte Bronte's "black marble clergymen" contained a powerful and accurate vision. Even the experience of attending church or chapel could for the working man be felt as an experience of separation rather than fellowship; Miall noted in his British Churches and the British People of 1848 how

The service concludes, and the worshippers retire. Communion with God has not disposed them to communion with each other, beyond the well-defined boundaries of class. 77

Religion displayed itself as - and was felt often to be - part of a whole structure of social class domination. "The rich man in his castle, the poor man at his gate" is a well-enough known expression of this; Dyos and Wolff's The Victorian City offers a further image: an illustration from The Illustrated London News of

1867 shows a "new ward for casual poor at Marylebone workhouse", its high roof beams inscribed for the edification of the destitute, "God is Truth, God is Good, God is Holy, God is Just, God is Love ..." 78

To the extent that the churches neither emphasized nor adequately embodied the "love" they were in theory bound to hold as central, they were seen as unrewarding communities by those outside them, and experienced as such by those inside. E.R. Wickham sees the lack of social thought in the churches as a specific cause of their numerical decline in the later years of the century; a negative personal morality ousted concern for social morality, and spirituality in the churches became "pathologically religious or highly conventional." 79

Secularization was fuelled by the inadequacy of the churches' responses to a changing world, by a failure to demonstrate that their 'gospel' was much more than a conventional aspect of a received social pattern.

Social change itself can be seen as a further impulse towards secularization. Commenting on the axiom that "the industrial revolution divided men from God", Chadwick observes that the general statistic is clear:

... the larger the town, the smaller the percentage of persons who attended church on Sundays ... 80

If, that is, the Victorian age is one of industrial development and urbanization, a corollary is that it is also one of religious unsettlement and decline. Susan Budd's study of the secularist movement Varieties of Unbelief offers interesting comment here; she suggests that whereas the birth of religious faith "drew men into society", its loss led to relative social isolation:

Secularists seem to have been relatively detached from close links with their families and local communities. Over half of this group of one hundred and fifty men (i.e. her study cohort) had moved long distances during their lives, often from rural or small-town areas to large towns ... 81

There seems to be, that is, a link between mobility, looser social

ties, and formal secularism: and, it is fair to suggest, a more general link between mobility and a fading of religious commitment. Where social change means disruption of known patterns and relationships, movement and a loss of rootedness, it also means a loosening of religious ties and loyalties, since these are often formed and developed specifically in a given place, a known context. But again, the evidence is not all clear. Chadwick argues that despite the loosening of formal religious ties there existed "a subconscious continuity in the mind of countryman father and townsman son"; and attempting to characterize the outlook of "the working man" of the mid-Victorian city, he says he

... was somewhere between unconscious secularist and unconscious Christian. He did not at all object to people who were rude about clergymen and churches, he usually objected to people who were rude about God ...

Chadwick's reservations here are a further reminder that secularization should not be seen as a straightforward "decline in religion"; but the impact of rapid and massive social change was clearly inimical to the growth of religious consciousness in general.

It is, therefore, in a context of secularizing religious change that the novelists here in question write. Their perceptions, their particularities, are arguably more valuable for an understanding of religious change than are the necessarily more generalized observations of historians; and the following chapters of this thesis will attempt to illustrate this through a discussion of selected novels in relation to the writers' own backgrounds and religious experiences.

NOTES TO CHAPTER I

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CHAPTER II

The Treatment of Religion in the Novels of Mrs. Gaskell.

Elizabeth Gaskell was by birth, upbringing and marriage a member of a small and distinctive religious body, the Unitarians; and an examination of her personal and religious background throws interesting light on her concern as a novelist with religious questions and the religious world. Her father was a Unitarian and the young Elizabeth Stevenson grew up as a member of the Brook Street Unitarian Chapel, Knutsford. This religious world was formative for her. Her most recent biographer, Winifred Gerin, has gone so far as to argue that

...outside the immediate family orbit, the strongest single influence on her childhood was certainly religion! /

And the world of the chapel clearly provided a social as well as a religious context. Despite her time at boarding schools, where Anglican service was part of the Sunday routine, Elizabeth Stevenson's main social connections were among Unitarians. After her father's death it was to Unitarian friends and relations that she went, and her marriage to William Gaskell in 1832 confirmed her place in the Unitarian circle. Subsequently, as wife, mother and as novelist, she remained firmly within the Unitarian world, closely linked, at Cross Street Chapel, Manchester, with many of the most notable Unitarians of the age.

The theological and social characteristics of Unitarianism are clearly defined. Historically, Unitarianism developed during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries from Presbyterianism. Historians of this process point out how the Presbyterians, once the most influential of the old Dissenting bodies, had lost ground by their hostile attitude to "enthusiasm" in eighteenth-century religion:

By resisting the Evangelical revival, the Presbyterians had cut themselves off from the main stream of the religious life of England. In choosing to ally themselves with the "liberalizing" forces which were endeavouring to reconcile Christian faith and the new scientific outlook, they had separated themselves from the "energizing" forces which were endeavouring to bring religion to the masses ... 2

The end of the century saw Presbyterianism virtually extinguished, except where the force of rationalizing ideas had succeeded in creating a new, Unitarian character. Presbyterians became, by stages, "moderate" or "rational" Dissenters, and then Unitarians - believers in a rational, non-trinitarian Christianity which denied the divinity of Christ but exalted his human example, and which concentrated on social usefulness rather than evangelistic outreach. The rational Anglicans led by Theophilus Lindsey, who had founded Essex Street Chapel in London in 1774, represented one aspect of Unitarianism, a theological liberalism which encouraged free enquiry; Joseph Priestley's political liberalism was another ingredient.

Unitarianism's strenuous intellectuality, its distrust of emotionalism and its sympathy with radical political movements - first Jacobin and later Chartist - prevented it from ever becoming a popular creed. Owen Chadwick notes that the 1851 Religious Census recorded only 229 places of Unitarian worship in England and Wales, and that the number varied little through the century.³ Unitarianism remained a small, largely middle-class, body throughout the period of Mrs. Gaskell's life.⁴

In theological terms, however, Unitarianism had a certain importance. James Martineau, the leader of what might be called the mystical impulse among Unitarians, has been described as "one of the leading Christian divines of all the Victorian churches."⁵ And for many prominent Victorians the Unitarian outlook was one which, in an age of theological upheaval, represented a necessary compromise between a respect for traditional pieties on the one hand, and a commitment to rational enquiry on the other. Notable converts to Unitarianism during the period included Blanco White, chaplain to Archbishop Whately in 1834, John Sterling, F.W. Newman, A.H. Clough, and Stopford Brooke, who resigned his orders in 1880.⁶ The case of

F.D. Maurice, who moved from Unitarianism to the Church of England, seems a less representative one. The intellectual and moral appeal of Unitarianism is clear; Unitarians did not need to avoid or resist critical enquiry - indeed Charles Kennell's "Enquiry Concerning the Origin of Christianity" of 1838 was an early contribution to the mid-Victorian critical debate - and their placid piety maintained a profound reverence. William Gaskell, for instance, exemplifies the authentic tone of Unitarianism, rational and reverent:

Whoever ventures to place himself in the chair of authority betrays, by that very act, a radical misconception of the nature of religious truth He must descend from this position, and become a meek disciple in the school of fearless, thorough-going, and untiring investigation ... 7

Gaskell's is also an optimistic outlook, characteristically Unitarian in its lofty assurance and thoroughly Victorian in its expression:

(We can see that) there is a law of progress in steady operation; that the empire of evil is growing less and less, and the dominion of good extending more and more, confirming the great truth ... that the Supreme Ruler of the universe cares for our welfare, and justifying the consoling

" ... trust that somehow good shall be the final goal of all." 8

A viewpoint both rational, optimistic and reverent, rather than iconoclastic, was distinctive - and attractive - particularly in the earlier Victorian years when a predominant Calvinistic Evangelicalism purveyed an aura of gloomy dogmatism. Unitarianism's lack of dogma and its calm rationality had a significant appeal.

There were, none the less, inconsistencies and confusions in the Unitarian view. For one thing, Unitarianism comprised congregations of very different outlooks, emphasizing, at the extremes, the rationalism of the Priestley tradition or the devotionism of James Martineau. Owen Chadwick considers these two elements ultimately incompatible;⁹ and certainly the picture of F.D. Maurice's father, a Unitarian minister, baptising with the trinitarian formula out of

respect for Scripture, is an odd one.¹⁰ To some Victorian observers, notes Chadwick, Unitarianism appeared unsatisfactory:

To minds troubled by Victorian doubt (it) often appeared a resting-place which was at best temporary, a wobble between confident faith and confident scepticism. //

Harriet Martineau, in particular, pointed out what she saw as the intellectual inconsistency of what had once been her own faith. It seemed to her, on reflection, a temporary resting-place on the path from Orthodoxy to Atheism - and an intellectually dishonest one at that :

Unitarianism is a mere clinging, from association and habit, to the old privilege of faith in a divine revelation, under an actual forfeiture of all its essential conditions. //

The logic of this position, as Miss Martineau went on to show, was one which finally enforced the dissolution of faith:

It is clear ... that a christianity which never was received as a scheme of salvation, - which never was regarded as essential to salvation - which might be treated, in respect to its records, at the will and pleasure of each believer - which is next declared to be independent of its external evidences, because those evidences are found to be untenable, - and which is finally subjected in its doctrines, as in its letter, to the interpretation of each individual - must cease to be a faith, and become a matter of speculation, of spiritual convenience, and of intellectual and moral taste, till it declines to the rank of a mere fact in the history of mankind. //

Harriet Martineau's view of Unitarianism is one echoed, interestingly, by the sociologist Bryan Wilson. Wilson notes that Unitarianism - at least in its rationalist guise - completed the "demythification of the world" begun by the early reformers of the sixteenth century. Further, he argues, it made evident the choice

... between religion and rationalism, between a mystic view of the world and belief in the intercession of God in human affairs, and the explanation of affairs in more scientific terms. //

According to this analysis, Unitarianism appears as a version of religion which points on to a non-religious outlook. Harey posed the question, "was their doctrine any longer religious at all?";

and Wilson remarks that "it has become increasingly difficult to maintain a limited rationalism."¹⁶ Both to some contemporary observers, then, and to later ones, Victorian Unitarianism seemed characterized by profound inner contradictions, an illustration of part of the secularization process. As a novelist, Mrs. Gaskell was aware of this - even if in her personal life she showed no particular signs of religious insecurity.

The Unitarian social world was a small one, as has been said. It was also almost cosy in the enclosedness of its relationships. Accounts in The Unitarian of 1846 onwards of tea-meetings, lectures and presentations convey an atmosphere of domestic closeness, and Susan Budd in her Varieties of Unbelief confirms this impression:

Unitarian congregations were tightly knit by intermarriage and concentrated in certain areas, where they often came to play a leading part in civic affairs.¹⁷

This social influence of Unitarians was, as Halévy remarks, "out of proportion to their small numbers";¹⁸ and Asa Briggs suggests that among Nonconformists the small sects - particularly the Unitarians - played a strategic part in urban life, providing leadership and stimulating interest in reform.¹⁹ It was, perhaps, less for their theology than for their social involvement that Unitarians were known. Certainly, the record of Unitarian participation in reforming movements is impressive, as chronicled by R.V. Holt in The Unitarian Contribution to Social Progress in England. With a characteristic social enlightenment, Unitarians worked for reform in industry, local government, social welfare and education. Briggs notes that Unitarianism was the religion of many of Birmingham's most influential families, and comments on its impact in other major cities such as Manchester and Liverpool;²⁰ so decisive was its effect that he concludes that

Where Unitarianism was weak in the nineteenth century, Liberalism lacked a social cutting edge. 21

Cross Street Chapel, Manchester, which was Mrs. Gaskell's place of worship throughout her married life, was particularly active as a community which used its influence in public life. Thomas Baker's Memorials of a Dissenting Chapel (1884) stresses the civic involvement of the chapel's members:

The Chapel has furnished its complement of public men Seven names may be selected of gentlemen who have discharged the duties of High Sheriffs of Counties, eleven who have been Members of Parliament, and ten who held the highest civic authority in Manchester as Borough reeves or Mayors. 22

Baker's tone of pride is understandable when we recall the social disadvantages of Dissenters, and the tendency for successful Nonconformists to rise in the social scale by becoming Anglicans. A speech of William Gaskell's further illustrates Cross Street's satisfaction in its distinctive social contribution:

It has been said that a Dissenting carriage never goes for two generations to Chapel, but that of the Philipses has been an honourable exception. (applause) I remember the brother of the chairman once going on a deputation to the then Prime Minister, and his Lordship asking the members of the deputation to what denomination they belonged. When he came to Mr. Philips he said, "what persuasion are you of?" Mr. Philips replied, "Oh, I'm a Unitarian, and I don't care who knows it." (applause) 23

Cross Street clearly felt its Unitarian distinctness and its social influence. In addition, it was seen from outside as an educated and culturally stimulating circle; Susannah Winkworth writes almost flatteringly of this particular context of provincial Dissent:

The Unitarians in Manchester were, as a body, far away superior to any other in intellect, culture and refinement of manners, and certainly did not come behind any other in active philanthropy and efforts for the social improvement of those around them. 24

Mrs. Gaskell herself had a less fully satisfied view of the Unitarian world, however. Her daughters' marriage prospects were limited, she felt, by the anti-Dissenting prejudices of eligible Anglican young men, or by the lack of culture among Unitarians:

... The Unitarian young men are either good and uncultivated, or rich and regardless of ... higher qualities....²⁵

And the endless round of sermons and tea-meetings obligatory for a minister's wife was irksome for her - "a sermon hater".²⁶ Nonetheless, she took considerable pride in her husband's educational work - work of great variety and distinction - and when he was offered Unitarianism's senior post at Essex Street Chapel in 1859, she supported his refusal, on the grounds, it seems, of the extensive involvement in Manchester society he would have to forfeit:

... he declined and wisely and rightly I think. He could never get in London the influence and good he has here.²⁷

The Unitarian circle in Manchester seems to have provided a largely satisfying context for Mrs. Gaskell: the correspondence gives the impression of an extremely full domestic and social life, where chapel membership was a social link with much of the bourgeois elite of Manchester and an entree to its intellectual and cultural life.

Elizabeth Gaskell was immersed in her domestic and chapel worlds. The Letters show her absorbed in the life of her daughters and husband, and in the literary work she undertook from 1848 onwards. They do not show her absorbed in religion. Her faith seems to have been untroubled, even unreflecting, at a personal level. She conveys an impression of personal piety, most often in terms which suggest dependence on familiar devotional phrases: "I do often pray for trust in God, complete trust in him",²⁸ she says in a letter of 1841. In 1862 she writes to an unknown correspondent

... always remember to ask God for light and help - for with Him all things are possible - and it almost astonishes one sometimes to find how He sends down answers to one's prayers in bright new thoughts²⁹

Clearly, Mrs. Gaskell's mind did not examine in any detail her emotional impulses towards the pietistic cliché. Her personal commitment, that is, was not to the rationalistic strain in

Unitarianism but to the warmer, more devotional impulses. Her religion was predominantly emotional. This is not, however, to suggest its irrelevance to her life or writing. Though there is no evidence of any disturbing religious upheaval in her life - no "conversion" experience of emotional power - there is no doubt about the force of the religious impulse behind her work. A letter of 1849 interestingly links her personal faith with her work as a novelist, the occasion being the reception of Mary Barton:

"Some people here are very angry and say the book will do harm; and for a time I have been shaken and sorry; but I have such firm faith that the earnest expression of anyone's feelings can only do good in the long run, - that God will cause the errors to be temporary, the truth to be eternal, that I try not to mind too much. 30

The attempt to express - and share - one's feelings is seen here as almost a religious act; an attempt to spread enlightenment. And this remained the impulse behind Ruth:

"I have no doubt that what was meant so earnestly must do some good 31

Despite opposition from illiberal members of the chapel community - from industrialists over Mary Barton and from respectable family men over Ruth - Mrs. Gaskell continued what was in effect a venture of faith, seeing her writing - perhaps by modern standards naively - as part of a religiously-impelled crusade to promote the values of love and tolerance to which she was committed.

Elizabeth Gaskell writes from within a specific religious tradition, one which as I hope to show provides her with certain insights into the tensions and conflicts of religious change. At the same time, she writes with curiously unsophisticated dependence on the most obvious religious emotion. She is uniquely well placed to offer an account of the religious world, and yet debilitated in a characteristically Victorian way by her inability to escape from the constraints of popular pietism.

Mary Barton is specifically and deliberately a novel of religious liberalism. It has behind it, that is, the full force of a religious intention, and carries within it a religious recommendation which is derived from Mrs. Gaskell's own context of liberal Christianity. The novel has, at one level, a generally educative intention: the writer's careful rendering of working-class life and speech is part of an attempt to express to an ignorant middle class the reality and authenticity of the lives of Manchester workpeople. But more importantly, the whole novel moves towards what Mrs. Gaskell hopes will be a recognition by her readers of the essential community of human beings - the brotherhood of man and the fatherhood of God. The final, brief moment of reconciliation between John Barton and Carson, as Barton lies dying,³² is intended to express this liberal Christian notion of human mutuality and at the same time to offer a religious perspective on class relations. Unmistakably the novel comes from, and carries the identity of, the liberal religious world: socially-concerned, optimistic, appropriately pious, it aims to inform, enlighten and ultimately to improve the condition of society.

The novelist's religious commitment is made plain not only in the shaping and direction of plot, but also in her handling of character and narrative. The novel's narrative language is pervasively religious, and Mrs. Gaskell draws on the Bible extensively to provide a recognisable context of pious reference. Her original audience would have recognised not only Mrs. Gaskell's favourite texts of comfort - "the tears shall be wiped away from all eyes",³³ and so on - but her frequent allusions to Biblical ideas and phraseology. Alice, for instance, is sick "nigh unto death";³⁴ Jem listens to the "still, small voice";³⁵ and Esther, leaving Mary, goes out into "outer darkness",³⁶ a phrase which is intended to work at a symbolic rather than simply allusive level. This use of Biblical phrasing draws, quite clearly, on a common stock of well-known passages; but more esoteric is the writer's

use of a specialized devotional vocabulary which evokes more precisely the world of the liberal Dissenting chapel. Mrs. Gaskell talks, for example, of "heart-sympathy" and of being "soul-compelled";³⁷ and of "heart-service and love-works";³⁸ and the cloying sentimentality of this language register is echoed when she comments of Jem Wilson that

... the thought of his mother stood like an angel with a drawn sword in the way to sin.³⁹

The phrase recalls not simply the religious tract but also the religious picture. At moments in the novel such as this, it is clear that the language of the chapel is for Mrs. Gaskell both natural and disastrous - its categories simply cannot deal with the issues which she has set herself to confront in Mary Barton.

There is, in fact, a curious inconsistency between Mrs. Gaskell's recourse to religious cliché as narrator, and the dramatic force of her writing in dialogue and inner monologue. Working-class speech is rendered with vibrancy - it is one of the novel's most considerable achievements - but the pious phrase comes too easily to the narrator. When, for instance, John Barton hurries home to his sick wife,⁴⁰ she is to him "worse, much worser than ever I saw her before." To Mrs. Gaskell, however, Mrs. Barton is not worse, but "at peace. The cries were still for ever." Against the consoling formula - "at peace" - however, is set the powerful evocation of Barton's shocked sense of loss:

Barton sat on, like a stock or a stone, so rigid, so still. He heard the sounds above, too, and knew what they meant. He heard the stiff unseasoned drawer, in which his wife kept her clothes, pulled open. He saw the neighbour come down, and blunder about in search of soap and water. He knew well what she wanted, and why she wanted them⁴¹

Interestingly, Mrs. Gaskell's creative imagination tells her that the neighbour's kindly-meant "text of comfort" is of no use to Barton; but as authorial commentator, she is content with "at peace". It is a failure of imaginative honesty which points to one of the novel's central uncertainties: whether the author is genuinely representing the case

of the poor or whether her intention is to endorse the comforting, middle-class values of the liberal chapel world. In the end, chapel values carry the day.

This is particularly clearly seen in Mrs. Gaskell's treatment of her characters, many of whom are examples of pious submission in the face of suffering. The writer quite consciously offers Alice, Margaret and Davenport as people who find comfort in a religious acceptance of the evils of the world. Alice specifically teaches patience to Mary - "wait patiently on the Lord, whatever your troubles may be." - ⁴² and the lesson is clearly intended for a wider audience by Mrs. Gaskell: the novel may be seen to operate partly at the level of the religious tract. Margaret, again, enforces the need for patience - "one of God's lessons we all must learn" - ⁴³ and Alice's religious gratitude - "I've had well nigh every blessing in life" - ⁴⁴ is seen as a prelude to her happy death; materially poor, she is shown as enjoying a richly fulfilled spiritual life, which is perfectly rounded off as she approaches death with the words of the Nunc Dimittis - "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace" ⁴⁵ Davenport, similarly, is presented as learning the lesson of submission; the letter to his wife has "ne'er a word of repining", but is "as good as Bible words",

"... a' about God being our father, and that we mun bear patiently whate'er he sends." ⁴⁶

Though with Davenport, it is worth noting, Mrs. Gaskell is in difficulty; he is made to serve two incompatible purposes in the narrative - as an example first of destitution and then of godly resignation. Mrs. Gaskell's uncertainty is whether to be outraged by the destitution she presents so powerfully (chapter 6) or to be prepared to accept the existence of poverty as part of the divine purpose, to be suffered willingly as such. It is an uncertainty implicit in the liberal, optimistic view of Providence, part of the chapel inheritance.

Her characters, then, are intended to teach the liberal-religious virtue of submission, what Mrs. Gaskell herself in a direct authorial address to the reader refers to as "enduring meekly what my Father sees fit to send."⁴⁷ The moral struggles of the characters are also meant to be religiously educative. Mary Barton herself is shown as having to resist the voice of the "tempter",⁴⁸ Carson, and the brief incident where she comforts the young Italian boy is illustrative of the moral -religious duty of following the loving emotion of the heart rather than the first, thoughtless impulse.⁴⁹ Jem Wilson, too, when he meets Esther, is seen as responding to her need in a sympathetic way after his first, dismissive inclination, though Mrs. Gaskell makes the point that he subsequently regretted his "weariness in well-doing".⁵⁰ More importantly, in the moral struggle over Carson, Jem Wilson is seen first harbouring, then finally overcoming, a murderous impulse: the "still, small voice" of conscience eventually convinces him of the right path. Mrs. Gaskell, it is clear, wants to miss no chance of offering a good example of christian living: her treatment of character echoes in places the moral-religious didacticism of the Sunday School.

But part of the strength of what remains a fine novel is equally derived from Christian tradition. Asa Briggs points out in Victorian Cities that "The natural language of Manchester ... was the Bible",⁵¹ and this Bible language provided not only a recognisable frame of reference, as I have tried to show, but also a morality. Mrs. Wilson's condemnation of police trickery, for example, instinctively takes a Biblical form,⁵² as does her dismissal of Mary as a "Delilah".⁵³ And John Barton's radical vision of social corruption is one which is specifically presented as derived from a Biblical tradition of the advocacy of social righteousness. Within the novel, that is, there works against Mrs. Gaskell's liberal, optimistic view of the possibility of social reconciliation a profoundly pessimistic view, embodied in

Barton, and a main reason for this is that he argues for a view of society totally opposed to the author's own. Both views find support in religious tradition and in the Bible. Mrs. Gaskell's own liberal-optimistic social views have behind them the sanction particularly of the New Testament; Barton's radical-pessimistic views go back to the Old Testament. In terms of the English religious tradition, Mrs. Gaskell's ideas are precisely those of liberal Christianity, whereas Barton - despite the fact that Mrs. Gaskell presents him as unrelated to any religious body - seems to be in the line of Calvinistic Dissent, or Independency, where the emphasis is on a stern morality of social separation. On occasion, Barton's speech echoes the toughness of Bunyan:

"I'd rather see her earning her bread by the sweat of her brow, as the Bible tells her she should do, ay, though she never got butter to her bread, than be like a do-nothing lady" 54

- and his deathbed words have the bitterness of a disillusioned idealist:

"... when I grew thoughtful and puzzled, I took to (the Bible) I would fain have gone after the Bible rules if I'd seen folk credit it; they all spoke up for it, and went and did clean contrary Then I took out two or three texts as clear as glass, and I tried to do what they bid me do. But I don't know how it was; masters and men, all alike cared no more for minding those texts, than I did for the Lord Mayor of London; so I grew to think it must be a sham put upon poor ignorant folk It was not long I tried to live Gospel-wise" 55

It is, however, on his deathbed that Barton is made to "repent", and alongside the radical vigour of his denunciation of the sham of society's religion, Mrs. Gaskell puts the flabbiness of his repentance - "All along it came natural to love folk" It is an awkward mixture, revealing the author's uncertainty with her creation.

Throughout the novel, in fact, Mrs. Gaskell has to make clear her reservations about Barton. The death of his wife is seen not only as personal tragedy, but as a loosening of

...one of the ties which bound him down to the gentle

humanities of earth⁵⁶

And as Barton's social despair increases, Mrs. Gaskell notes that "the thoughts of his heart were touched with sin."⁵⁷ Later, too, Barton's attempts to formulate a social philosophy are blandly written off by Mrs. Gaskell as the uneducated efforts of a "widely-erring judgement".⁵⁸ The author's sympathy for her character, that is, has its limits; and it is clear that Barton's "sin" must be paid for in his conscience-induced death, even if "the infinite mercy of God" offers hope in the "Future Life".⁵⁹ Compassion has its limits, too, in the case of Esther. Here, Mrs. Gaskell sustains an attitude of tolerance allowing Esther to explain sympathetically the process of her descent into the world of prostitution; but the author's courage seems to fail her at the last moment, and Esther remains an outcast, as much as a result of her own self-condemnation, her inclination to despair, as of Mrs. Gaskell's unwillingness to redeem her in principle. Both Esther and John Barton - characters whose lives cannot be seen as religious examples - are made to die in the fiction: Mrs. Gaskell cannot accept the social despair which they embody, and they share - symbolically - an unnamed grave. Together, they represent what must be disposed of before the novel can transfer its setting to the New World, and to the new life enjoyed there by Mary and Jem.

The romantic evasion of the end of Mary Barton is implicit in Mrs. Gaskell's religious commitment. Her liberal Christian optimism impelled her to a vision of social reconciliation and to a rejection of radical social despair. At odds within the novel, as I have tried to show, are the writer's intense and powerful evocation of working class life, and her commitment to a notion of human community; her understanding of despair and her championing of optimism. Throughout, her religious position is not only evident, but artistically decisive. And it is interesting that the novel attempts with such confidence its didactic purpose. There is a clear assumption throughout that religious

language will not only make sense to but also carry weight with the audience: reference or allusion to Scripture is an appeal to a commonly-held authority. Mrs. Gaskell addressed herself in Mary Barton to a society which she perceived as religious, rather than secular.

In Ruth, Mrs. Gaskell centres her concern not on the wide question of social relationships in an industrial society as she had done in Mary Barton, but on the more precise issue of society's treatment of the seduced woman. The novel argues - anticipating Hardy in Tess of the D'Urbervilles - that virginity is not the same as purity; and seeks to extend social compassion towards the victims, as Ruth is seen to be, of economic and sexual exploitation. Behind the novel is the force of the writer's social concern, an aspect of the chapel world she inhabited. And just as clearly as in Mary Barton, we feel the pressure of her religious commitment. But - and this marks an important change - Mrs. Gaskell now turns directly to examine the world of the Dissenting chapel, for the debate about values now takes place within that context. Ruth herself, being brought into the chapel community, forces it to re-evaluate its system of moral judgements - and Mrs. Gaskell shows us what is involved in the process of change.

The Dissenting chapel in Ruth is presented with care and detail. In Mary Barton, the spirituality of the characters is unrelated to a specific social-religious context; Davenport is spoken of as a "Methodist", and Alice's recollections of childhood evoke a rural Anglicanism, but nowhere is there a felt religious community. Ruth, in contrast, offers in Benson's chapel a portrait of a self-contained and self-sufficient social world. Ecclestone, in fact, is not really felt in the novel as Ruth's context at all; instead, that context is provided by the chapel itself and the two houses - Benson's and Bradshaw's - which Ruth knows. Only at the end of the novel does Ecclestone present itself as a sizeable town, as Ruth extends her social world by visiting among the sick and nursing at the infirmary. It is

with great effect that Mrs. Gaskell evokes the warm and enclosed chapel world. And she is careful, too, to give an account of the chapel's history and social composition: it is a rooted community -

The congregation consisted of here and there a farmer with his labourers, who came down from the uplands above the town to worship where their fathers worshipped, and who loved the place because they knew how much those fathers had suffered for it, although they never troubled themselves with the reasons why they left the parish church; and of a few shopkeepers, far more thoughtful and reasoning, who were Dissenters from conviction, unmixed with old ancestral association; and of one or two families of still higher worldly station. With many poor, who were drawn there by love for Mr. Benson's character, and by a feeling that the faith which made him what he was could not be far wrong, for the base of the pyramid, and with Mr. Bradshaw for its apex, the congregation stood complete. 60

Mrs. Gaskell is here effectively aware of the changing historical continuity of Dissent - though there seems to be an element of wishful thinking in the presence in the chapel of the "many poor": liberal Dissent, of the Benson kind, was in fact not a popular faith, and the writer perhaps tacitly admits this during the course of the novel, in which the chapel poor do not feature. As Mrs. Gaskell creates it, the chapel world is predominantly middle class - and, with Bradshaw at its apex, with his fondness for "patronising",⁶¹ would doubtless be uncongenial for anyone much lower in the social scale than himself.

Mrs. Gaskell's observation of this chapel world is exact. In Benson, first of all, there is an acute study of the minister's social position. A man of intelligence and learning - a product of the Dissenting academies - his respectability is hard-won; to Bellingham's upper-middle class eyes he is "shabby and seedy". The writer emphasizes his economic insecurity, which creates a pressure on him to conform to the chapel members' religious expectations: Bradshaw, as the donor of a quarter of Benson's salary, is both his financial and social master, and wants to be his religious master, too. It is a theme brought out later in Mrs. Oliphant's Salem Chapel. The

potential conflict between Benson and Bradshaw is noted well before it actually occurs: Benson's pedigree, his descent from a "radical and a democrat",⁶² indicates his separation from Bradshaw, for whom politics is a question of achieving social dominance. Bradshaw's championing of the Liberal-Dissenting interest is for him a matter of social advance; the chapel has provided him with a limited, preparatory sphere of dominance, and social ambition now drives him towards a wider one. That ideals are abandoned in the quest for political power is, of course, a shrewd comment by the author on the weakness of Dissent. Whereas in Benson, Dissent is linked with a radical tradition of conscientious nonconformity, in Bradshaw Dissent has lost its radical basis and is linked with the rising political power of industry and commerce. It is an effective contrast on Mrs. Gaskell's part - and her own experience told her about the coexistence of such different impulses within the chapel world. When Ruth's true history becomes known, the debate she precipitates within the Dissenting community is more than a conflict between Benson and Bradshaw: it has representative force as a conflict between conscientious and self-advancing tendencies in Dissent, or in Benson's terms, between Christ and the world.

This antithesis is central to the novel. For Mrs. Gaskell - and for Benson - "Christ" stands for liberal values of tolerance and love, and for the willingness to reconsider a moral position - for moral openness. "The world" is characterized by a condemnatory morality which is quick to discover and reject "sin", and which holds to conventional and static notions of right and wrong. A passage at the beginning of Ruth points out the force of conventionality -

"The daily life into which people are born and into which they are absorbed before they are well aware, forms chains which only one in a hundred has moral strength enough to despise, and to break when the right time comes - when an inward necessity for independent individual action arises, which is superior to all outward conventionalities"⁶³

- and Benson's struggle to break free of old ideas of "sin" when he meets

Ruth is effectively rendered, so that the reader understands the strength of the "chains" of accepted morality. What is so startling about Ruth to Benson and his sister is that she seems free of conventional moral responses entirely. She reacts to life with a simple, instinctive responsiveness which offers a radical challenge to "morality". When, for instance, Ruth learns of her pregnancy, her first words are "Oh, my God, I thank Thee!" - words which to Faith Benson show Ruth as "very depraved", since she is "not seeing the thing in a moral light."⁶⁴ At this point, Faith is still bound by the conventional view: Benson himself is not. For it is Benson who, responding to "inward necessity" - his strangely troubled conscience, incapable of writing Ruth off - takes "independent individual action" by accepting a moral responsibility for Ruth when no one else will. Benson is moving towards a new morality, his religious commitment forcing him to acknowledge what he calls the "burst of nature" from Ruth's heart and to put aside moral timidity:

"... do not accuse me of questionable morality, when I am trying more than ever I did in my life to act as my blessed Lord would have done." ⁶⁵

Faith Benson's response - "These are quite new ideas to me." - makes explicit the effect which Ruth has; she acts as a stimulus to moral discovery, forcing a re-evaluation of previously held ideas.

The question for Mrs. Gaskell is to what extent the chapel world is capable of opening itself to moral change, to the new moral insight. At first, it is from outside the Chapel that the conventional condemnation of Ruth comes, in Mrs. Bellingham's letter:

I shall pray that you may turn to an honest life, and I strongly recommend you, if indeed you are not "dead in trespasses and sins", to enter some penitentiary. ⁶⁶

Here, Mrs. Gaskell's irony exposes clearly the self-righteous and socially self-protective stance which, borrowing religious language, acquires a religious sanction: clearly, Mrs. Bellingham's religion has, for Mrs. Gaskell, more to do with that of the Pharisees than of Christ.

But a similar response comes from within the Chapel world, from Bradshaw, whose moral categories are no less arrogant than Mrs. Bellingham's:

He drew a clear line of partition, which separated mankind into two great groups, to one of which, by the grace of God, he and his belonged; while the other was composed of those whom it was his duty to try and reform, and bring the whole force of his morality to bear upon 67

What Bradshaw above all cannot accept is a challenge to his static and self-centred view of the world, and Ruth, by bringing uncertainty, offers precisely this:

"She has turned right into wrong and wrong into right, and taught you all to be uncertain whether there be any such thing as Vice in the world, or whether it ought not to be looked upon as Virtue" 68

Bradshaw's perception here is outraged, but not wholly inaccurate: Ruth does, indeed, invite a reconsideration of what is meant by "Vice" and "Virtue".

Benson embodies the liberal willingness to pursue a new moral path, but Mrs. Gaskell does not unreservedly endorse his stance. In certain respects he and his household are ideal examples of an educated, rational Dissent. Clearly differentiated from the enthusiastic excesses of Methodism (effectively satirized by Sally) the Benson household follows a quiet and dignified style of life, and the reverent solemnity of chapel worship led by Benson echoes this. But Benson's lie - the attempt to conceal the true facts about Ruth - is deeply unsatisfactory to the author. Benson "thought he saw its necessity", but Mrs. Gaskell cannot agree. It is, to her,

The decision, the pivot, on which the fate of years moved; and he turned it the wrong way. 69

In accepting his sister's suggestion of concealment, Benson is "doing evil that good may come" - a principle which, in reference to public life, he later forcefully disowns.⁷⁰ He does, in fact, at a crucial

point, make a compromise with "the world", and Mrs. Gaskell makes plain her reservations about what to her is an act of moral cowardice. But this itself becomes part of Benson's moral education. Painfully, he makes the discovery that it is better to "stand firm on the truth":⁷¹ and it is not just his first encounter with Ruth, but the whole train of events this leads to, which form a continuing process of developing moral awareness.

Even Benson's moral liberalism, however, is not capable of escaping traditional categories, and this points to an uncertainty in Mrs. Gaskell's own position. "Sin" is a term used by several characters when talking of Ruth. Now Mrs. Bellingham's self-righteousness is ironically exposed by the author, but she seems to make no such reservations when Benson and his sister - and even Bradshaw - use the word. Benson does not correct Faith's description of Ruth's yet unborn child as "this miserable offspring of sin", and himself refers to "this young creature's sin".⁷² Even late on in the novel, during his attempt to persuade Ruth to remain in Ecclestone despite Bradshaw's discovery about her past life, Benson reminds Ruth

"The shame of having your sin known to the world, should be as nothing to the shame you felt at having sinned." 73

And he equally harshly tries to interpret the social disapproval of Ruth as divine punishment:

"... all may turn aside from you, and may speak very harshly of you. Can you accept all this treatment meekly, as but the reasonable and just penance God has laid upon you ...?" 74

Benson, while moving towards a more open morality, is still unable to free himself from categories of "sin" and "penance" - and his use of them is in effect a betrayal of his liberal ideals and of Ruth herself. It is a confusion which Mrs. Gaskell does not remove herself from. In one sense, Bradshaw's confident and condemnatory use of "sin" is more

acceptable than Benson's: he does apply the notion that "sin" merits "punishment" with a stern consistency which forces him to disown even his son Dick. And Benson is vulnerable to the accusation Bradshaw makes:

"If there were more people like me, and fewer like you, there would be less evil in the world, sir. It's your sentimentalists that nurse up sin." 75

- vulnerable because at heart he shares the idea of "sin" to which Bradshaw appeals. The novel argues for Ruth's moral purity - but the imaginative boldness of this assertion is too great in its entirety for characters moulded in the chapel world. Mrs. Gaskell's compassion, again, has its limits, for Ruth has to accept social misfortune as "penance", and finally the idea of "sin" is so powerful that - in one reading of the end of the novel - her death is required as "atonement." 76

The character of Ruth herself is, it seems, a major problem for Mrs. Gaskell. Just as Ruth troubles the Bensons first of all, then the chapel, and eventually the wider community, forcing upon all of them a revaluation of conventional moral notions, so she troubles Mrs. Gaskell. At one level, as I have suggested, the novel illustrates Ruth's moral purity. Her innocent love for Bellingham, her joy in the coming child as a blessing from God rather than a "badge of shame", her self-giving and self-fulfilling relationship with Leonard - the sense in which her love for her child develops her own loving nature - all demonstrate positive moral qualities which the author endorses. By implication, there is even in Ruth an endorsement of sexual creativity and particularly motherhood irrespective of the social conventionalities. Ruth's own sexuality, that is, her self-giving impulse, is seen as being naturally and positively expressed in her love for Bellingham - it is a love she does not "repent" of - and in her subsequent love and care for her own child and the Bradshaw children. For Esther in Mary Barton, her relationship with her

child is seen as a sanctifying influence; in Ruth, the heroine's relationship with her illegitimate child is almost redemptive. Within Ruth herself there is a spontaneous urge to love which is fulfilled in her experience of motherhood. And, equally spontaneous in Ruth is the impulse to religion, expressed more naturally in thanks and worship than in a self-accusing sense of guilt. Liberal Christianity's optimistic insistence on the goodness of human nature is well exemplified in Ruth. But Mrs. Gaskell, at another level, is insisting on Ruth's impurity, on the necessity for categories of "sin" and "penance". This profound uncertainty in the writer seems to reflect a conflict between imagination and religious-social conventionality; and, within her own religious tradition, between liberal moral notions and an accepted religious language which carries its own moral judgements. The novel does not resolve these uncertainties.

What the novel does succeed in making plain is the possibility of change in the world of the chapel. Very clear-sightedly, Mrs. Gaskell acknowledges the power of conservative forces which assert the most static and conventional judgements - and, in Bradshaw, assert them with all the authority of financial and social dominance within the chapel community. But she notes also the factors which can stimulate change: the chapel's original ideals themselves, rooted in the compassionate New Testament ethic; the presence of a minister whose liberal education enables him to respond to the new insight; and the introduction into the community of a new moral ingredient. In addition, the potential for change is seen to be in the future generation. Mrs. Gaskell portrays distinctly the repressiveness of Bradshaw's household, his bullying utilitarianism, and his commitment to an industrial-commercial ethic. She portrays too, however, the independence of Jenima's moral stance, and evokes strongly her rebellion against the family ethos. Jenima has the "moral strength"

of which Mrs. Gaskell speaks early in the novel - and when the "right time" comes, she acts against the power of convention in defying her father and dissociating herself from his system of values. Her support for Ruth - as against her father's condemnation - indicates the author's optimistic view of the possibility of progress in the moral world - an optimism deriving from her Unitarian faith.⁷⁷

Mrs. Gaskell's religious commitment is also evident in the novel's conclusion. Religious emotion clouds not just Benson's eyes, but the author's own, as she narrates the occasion of Ruth's funeral sermon. As in Mary Barton, a favourite text of comfort is used to evoke from the reader an appropriate religious response; as Benson reads Revelation, Chapter 7, and concludes with the words - "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes" - most of his hearers, notes Mrs. Gaskell, are themselves in tears. And it is clear that the writer wants the sacred words to "come home to" her audience, too, swelling as words of hers could not the wave of optimistic religious emotion on which the novel ends. There is a final falsification at this point, also. Bradshaw, now a chastened and softened man, not only responds with impulsive generosity towards Leonard, but is seen speechless with emotion before "his old friend", Benson. Wishful thinking - as in Mary Barton - brings together in a final reconciliation representatives of quite opposed outlooks. A novel which has the force of a radical challenge to received moral-religious viewpoints ends conventionally, endorsing popular pieties.

In North and South Mrs. Gaskell moves away from the enclosed world of the Dissenting chapel. Again, as in Mary Barton, the author is concerned with a wider society, and now explores the place of liberal religious values within that society as a whole. With a greater objectivity than in either of the other novels so far discussed, and

without any of their earnestness of religious pleading, Mrs. Gaskell examines the values by which industrial society operates, and considers to what extent they can be modified - humanized - by a specific religious approach. North and South is also a novel about education; chiefly the education of Margaret Hale, but also the education of others - Thornton, for instance - with whom she comes into contact. It is also, importantly, about religious attitudes, several of which are embodied in different characters. But finally - and this is the point to which the movement of the narrative directs attention - the novel concerns itself with reconciliation: with the recognition of a human relatedness more profound than either industrial or religious separation. Less insistently, perhaps, than Mary Barton, but nonetheless deliberately, North and South is a novel of religious liberalism.

Mrs. Gaskell's own optimistic outlook is apparent in her treatment of Margaret, and in Margaret's growth towards the discovery of the need for a changing order. It is Margaret's experience of a dynamic, purposeful society - the world of Milton-Northern, the "North" - which educates her, and which opens her eyes to the shortcomings of the Southern world of Helstone which at the beginning of the novel she idealizes. Mrs. Gaskell works with an ironic detachment not seen in the novels previously discussed to expose the callowness of Margaret's early enthusiasm for a picturesque and rustic order; when Henry Lennox comments that Helstone sounds like "a village in a tale", Margaret "eagerly" replies:

"And so it is All the other places in England that I have seen seem so hard and prosaic-looking, after the New Forest. Helstone is like a village in a poem." 78

Lennox's visit to Helstone (Chapter 3) provides Mrs. Gaskell with the opportunity to enforce her point. Helstone's cottages - and people - provide Margaret with pretty subjects for sketches; but rural inertia

and decay are evident. Hale's decision to resign his living and move North as a personal tutor offers in fact a liberation for Margaret, a release from an enclosed and cloying life. It is the beginning of her education. And during the course of the novel, Margaret's education continues - to the point where, on her return, nostalgically, to Helstone, she realizes that change is not only a necessary, but also a beneficent feature of life. Her first reaction to a changed Helstone is unsettled:

A sense of change, of individual nothingness, of perplexity and disappointment overpowered Margaret. Nothing had been the same; and this slight, all-pervading instability had given her greater pain than if all had been too entirely changed for her to recognise it. 79

But reflection brings the recognition that:

"If the world stood still, it would retrograde and become corrupt. Looking out of myself, and my own painful sense of change, the progress of all around me is right and necessary. I must not think so much of how circumstances affect me myself, but how they affect others, if I wish to have a right judgement, or a hopeful trustful heart." 80

Margaret's implicit recognition here of a beneficent Providence, ordering the progress of the world for the general good, is an important part of the liberal religious design of the novel. And the appropriate response - the "hopeful trustful heart" - is clearly one which carries Mrs. Gaskell's endorsement. What is noticeable, however, is the contrast between the effective evocation of regret in Margaret's response and the rather trite, sermonizing tone of her self-instruction: Mrs. Gaskell has not yet freed herself from the weaknesses of pious hopefulness.

But if, in Margaret, a religiously desirable position is slightly too obviously reached, the treatment of her characters' religious outlooks and experiences is something which Mrs. Gaskell does in North and South with generally powerful effect. Particularly, she creates a sense of the link between people's religion and their circumstances

in life - of the interpenetration of social and religious experiences. With greater detachment than before, that is, the author observes the social origins and consequences of particular religious adherences. This is perhaps most effectively managed in the treatment of Bessy Higgins. Here Mrs. Gaskell presents a form of faith which is not inherently agreeable to her - a kind of primitive Methodism, it appears - and yet deals with it in such a way that we see its force and appropriateness in Bessy's life. Margaret's first encounter with Bessy is disconcerting to the clergyman's daughter; instead of being able to practice an Anglican benevolence, Margaret is rebuffed by the Higgins family's social independence.⁸¹ And Bessy's religion, equally, is an affront to Margaret's polite Anglican decencies: it has an apocalyptic fervour which Mrs. Gaskell relates to the hopelessness of Bessy's social condition. Margaret's own attempts at religious comfort towards Bessy are seen as what they are: the bland formulas of a too-easy orthodoxy, related more to hopes of social "acceptance" and "submission" than to the condition of the sufferer:

Margaret bent over and said, "Bessy, don't be impatient with your life, whatever it is - or may have been. Remember who gave it you, and made it wat it is." 82

In contrast to the anodyne respectability of this, Mrs. Gaskell tellingly presents Bessy's hysterical vindication of her own vision of the hereafter:

"... I think, if this should be th'end of all, and if all I've been born for is just to work my heart and life away, and to sicken in this dree placo, wi' them mill noises in my ears for ever, until I could scream out for them to stop, and let me have a little piece o'quiet - and wi' the fluff filling my lungs, until I thirst to death for one long deep breath o' the clear air yo' speak on ... - I think if this life is th' end, and there's no God to wipe away all tears from all eyes - yo' wench, yo'!" said she, sitting up and clutching violently, almost fiercely, at Margaret's hand, "I could go mad and kill yo', I could." 83

It is a clear response to an intolerable life: and Margaret's reply - "Bessy - we have a Father in Heaven." - points the total

inadequacy of a comforting, middle-class religion to the plight of exploited workpeople.

What Mrs. Gaskell succeeds in doing is to make vividly real both Bessy's condition and her religious response to it, in a way which both places and threatens Margaret's religious complacency. When, later (Chapter 19), Bessy refers to the story of Dives and Lazarus, applying it to her own condition, there is an intense religious appropriateness from which Margaret recoils, again to find personal reassurance in comfortable orthodoxies: Bessy's fanaticism - written off by Margaret as the result of a "feverish" brain - is seen to have a biting and radical intensity. And Mrs. Gaskell now injects not religious comfort but religious disturbingness into her use of Scripture. Bessy refers to the same text - Revelation 7¹⁷ - with which Benson had marked Ruth's death; in North and South, however, Mrs. Gaskell is not concerned with predictable religious emotion but with the social roots of religious fanaticism, and her treatment of religion in Bessy has the force and the cutting edge of social and religious criticism. To the comforting religious notion of Heaven, Mrs. Gaskell has added the more disturbing ideas of Judgement and Hell.

The treatment of Mr. Hale, however, is less satisfactory and more puzzling. It appears at first that Hale is to be presented as an example of conscientious Dissent - or even of religious Doubt. But despite the author's concern to establish Hale's distress about his decision to resign his Anglican living, his depression and introspection, the precise reasons for his action are never made clear. Mrs. Gaskell avoids contemporary comparisons - the career of F.W. Newman and the resignation of A.H. Clough from his Oxford fellowship - and is deliberately vague about the nature of Hale's uncertainties about the 39 Articles. Hale's reference to the ejection of 1662 seems anachronistic in the nineteenth-century context of the novel, and it

remains unclear to what extent he is supposed to remain an orthodox religious believer. He disowns doubts "as to religion",⁸⁴ and this seems to suggest an ambivalence on Mrs. Gaskell's part as well as vagueness in Hale himself: the avoidance of precision is perhaps an evasion of religiously controversial material. Whatever his theology, however, Hale retains what is for Mrs. Gaskell an unexceptionable piety. He joins his daughter in saying the Lord's Prayer,⁸⁵ and responds to her recitation of "all the noble verses of holy comfort, or texts expressive of faithful resignation" at his wife's funeral.⁸⁶ He is, in short, an example of the non-doctrinal, religiously concerned and responsive person who can earn the author's approval. It is a weakness in the novel that he never really earns her interest.

With Nicholas Higgins, however, Mrs. Gaskell finds a character who engages her attention, as John Barton did in Mary Barton. Higgins is presented as a shrewd, sceptical intelligence, to whom the proffered comforts of religion are irrelevant. His hostility to Margaret - expressed in his "I'll not have my vench preached to" - is rooted in a pragmatism which discounts the pious religious affirmation of a future heaven. And Mrs. Gaskell gives force to his scepticism:

"... when I see the world going all wrong at this time o' day, bothering itself wi' things it knows nought about, and leaving undone all the things that lie in disorder close at its hand - why, I say, leave a' this talk about religion above, and set to work on what yo' see and know." 87

Like Barton he is contemptuous of the hypocrisy of a soi-disant "Christian" society which ignores social justice. Higgins is struggling for the improvement of conditions of work here and now; and the author endorses his practical, social concern. For Higgins, the Union is an agency of justice, withstanding oppression; and Hale recognizes a religious ideal at work in the union principle - "binding men together in one common interest."⁸⁸ But finally, the Union's interest in social justice and social fellowship is a far cry from Hale's

personal piety: and it is a false note in the novel when Hale, Margaret and Higgins kneel in prayer - a reconciliation unjustified by the real separateness of their interests:

Margaret the churchwoman, her father the Dissenter, Higgins the Infidel, knelt down together. It did them no harm. 89

Mrs. Gaskell understates this moment with a restraint she did not command in, for instance, Mary Barton; but her religious optimism is still obviously at work.

Higgins's scepticism is balanced against Hale's piety, as Bessy's fanaticism is against Margaret's quieter, more respectable religion. One of the strengths of North and South, in fact, is the way in which different religious and social attitudes are poised together, and most crucially this is the case with Thornton and Margaret. If one aspect of Margaret's outlook is a naive piety, another is her concern for a notion of human interrelatedness which is seen as integral to her religion. The Anglican idea of community - of the coextensiveness of Church and People - lies behind Margaret's belief in interdependence: her social views have a religious origin -

"God has made us so that we must be mutually dependent. We may ignore our own dependence, or refuse to acknowledge that others depend upon us in more respects than the payment of weekly wages; but the thing must be, nevertheless." 90

Thornton is quite aware that his own views of social class opposition derive from a religious view, too; as he remarks, "I know we differ in our religious opinions." ⁹¹ Mrs. Gaskell presents Thornton quite specifically as a Puritan Dissenter. Matthew Henry's Commentary is ⁹² prominently displayed in his home, and in his view "Cromwell would have made a capital mill-owner." ⁹³ At family prayers, significantly, the Thornton household are "working steadily through the Old Testament." ⁹⁴ Thornton's principles of self-repression and habits of hard work - as well as his ideas of social separation and conflict - are presented as

deriving from his tough, Calvinistic outlook. Mrs. Gaskell makes clear in Thornton the link between religious and social intransigence.

The debate between Margaret's view of society as an organic, interdependent community and Thornton's view of the essential opposition between individuals and classes is, of course, of central importance in the novel. Mrs. Gaskell's concern is to argue for the optimistic and liberal view of social brotherhood; but what marks a considerable difference here from Mary Barton is the extent to which the debate is allowed to continue without authorial interference. There is a remarkable openness in the author's handling of this question, though finally the novel moves in the direction of her own views. For Thornton's ideas have behind them the force of conviction and experience, whereas Margaret's are seen to come from a personality distinctly unformed, and limited in social experience. And Higgins, too, argues with practical force against Margaret's idealistic outlook. The debate about values - really, as in Ruth, one between inflexible and humane outlooks - is not, that is, one whose outcome is obviously predetermined. What does appear contrived is the warmth of the relationships which develop across class barriers in North and South. The personal understanding which Thornton and Higgins finally arrive at has the unsatisfactoriness of an optimistic "solution", and Mrs. Gaskell hopes that this may lead to "far more charity and sympathy" ⁹⁵ between worker and employer remain, in the novel, hopes rather than fictional likelihoods. But there is no mistaking the author's intention. Reconciliation, she aims to show, is a social possibility when people meet as persons rather than as members of social classes or religious groups:

Once brought face to face, man to man, with an individual of the masses around him, and (take notice) out of the character of master and workman, in the first instance, they had each begun to recognise that "we have all of us one human heart". It was the fine point of the wedge. 96

- Mrs. Gaskell's affirmation of social optimism owes more to religious conviction than to social analysis; Margaret's words - "we do not reason, we believe"⁹⁷ - express well the author's outlook. But though North and South moves to a conclusion which is religiously determined, this does not do violence to the novel. And the novel offers - apart from its social optimism - a careful and penetrating study of the inter-relation of social and religious commitments.

In Mary Barton, Ruth and North and South, therefore, Mrs. Gaskell is exploring the applicability of religious convictions about the nature of society. Conscious of a moral and religious responsibility as a writer to "do some good", to extend awareness and sympathy, she moves in these three novels away from a method of direct religious recommendation - as in Mary Barton - and towards a more oblique method in which - as in North and South - various social and religious outlooks are debated within the dramatic presentation of the novel. Her own commitment remains clear, but clearer too is her evaluation of religion. These novels display an increasingly objective understanding of the social dimension of religion; of the tensions - in Ruth - of the chapel world as it grapples with new moral awareness; of the interpenetration of the social and religious worlds in North and South. In Cousin Phillis, Mrs. Gaskell offers her final exploration of the theme. With the greater objectivity provided by the particular narrative method she chooses here, she examines the place of religious values in a world of change. For Cousin Phillis is not just about "the inevitabilities of social change"⁹⁸, but also concerns itself with the particular tensions of which Mrs. Gaskell was aware as a religious writer. The tale creates a delicate sense of the process of passing time, and sets in balance tradition and change, rural and industrial and - importantly - religious and secular.

Mrs. Gaskell's choice of narrative method in Cousin Phillis is important. Not only does the use of a first-person narrator distance the tale from the author, it also provides her with the opportunity to view events through a particular - and significant - consciousness. Paul Manning is a crucial character in the tale. He has representative importance as a rising young man in a changing world - and his commitment is clearly to change and to the future. Mrs. Gaskell presents this partly as a question of social inheritance: Manning's father is similarly involved in a world of developing technology which is for him a sphere of personal advance -

... a mechanic by trade, (he) had some inventive genius, and a great deal of perseverance, and had devised several valuable improvements in railway machinery ... 99

When, during the course of the tale, we learn that Manning senior has been offered a partnership in the firm of "Ellison the Justice",¹⁰⁰ the narrator's delight has to do precisely with his father's achievement of a social respectability which he also aims for; and Mrs. Gaskell's deft perception of the place of family connections in the process of social advancement is clear in Paul Manning's almost coy announcement of his own subsequent marriage into the Ellison family.¹⁰¹ But this social inheritance - the son following in his father's self-improving footsteps - is also presented as a religious inheritance. Manning describes his father as "a sturdy, Independent by descent and conviction",¹⁰² and in the first few pages of the tale narrates the care to which his father goes in placing the son in suitable lodgings - within the Independent social circle - in Eltham. And it is at this point that Manning's perceptions of the social-religious world of Independency are important.

Manning's response to Eltham religion is one of disdain. To him, the rising, progressive young man, the close world of the chapel is stifling and irrelevant to the real concerns of life. Mrs. Gaskell is

careful to note the small and inter-connected nature of this religious world: the shop at which Manning lodges is "kept by the two sisters of our minister at home", and Manning's first contact with the Holmans at Hope Farm is made through family connections - Holman's wife is a second cousin of his mother's. What, however, for Manning's father is an important aspect of social life - the ready circle of relatives and mentors provided by the world of Independency - is for Manning himself a constriction: an undesired connection with a dated and passing way of life. Manning's disdain is made plain from the outset. Dinah and Hannah Dawson are seen by him as intrusively and ridiculously concerned with his "morals" - their attitude towards Holdsworth significantly one of suspicion - and the Independent community as a whole is seen as lifeless and dying:

On Sundays I went twice to chapel, up a dark narrow entry, to hear droning hymns, and long prayers, and a still longer sermon, preached to a small congregation, of which I was, by nearly a score of years, the youngest member. Occasionally, Mr. Peters, the minister would ask me home to tea after the second service. I dreaded the honour, for I usually sat on the edge of my chair all the evening, and answered solemn questions put in a deep bass voice, until household prayer-time came, at eight o'clock, when Mrs. Peters came in, smoothing down her apron, and the maid-of-all-work followed, and first a sermon, and then a chapter was read, and a long impromptu prayer followed, till some instinct told Mr. Peters that supper-time had come, and we rose from our knees with hunger for our predominant feeling. Over supper the minister did unbend a little into one or two ponderous jokes, as if to show me that ministers were men, after all. 103

The narrator's dry and telling account of Independent worship and social life is remarkably anticipatory of the response of Mark Rutherford. Through Manning's eyes we view a religious community in irreversible decline, its "dark" half-existence in obvious contrast to the full-blooded and progressive vitality represented by Holdsworth. Here, "religion" is a negation of all positive impulse, and "life" to be found elsewhere - in the practical, secular world of industrial advance. Mrs. Gaskell makes effectively clear the difference between the succeeding generations: Manning senior has a rooted loyalty to his

religious world - the son sees that world as fixed in the past, of no possible interest to him. The life-denying aspect of Independency is further seen in the narrator's account of Brother Robinson's visit to the farm during Phillis's illness. Here, "religion" is again a question of negation, even punitiveness, as Robinson suggests that the illness is a divine judgement upon Holman's "worldly" concerns - his interest in his farm and in learning.¹⁰⁴

But Independency has another face, one with which the narrator is more impressed. If one version of religion in Cousin Phillis is the life-denying world of droning hymns and long prayers, another version, more fully life-accepting, is Holman's robust faith, one which is presented as having an organic relation with the real concerns of his life, whether agricultural, intellectual or simply personal. Mrs. Gaskell is aware that Holman's particularly unified approach to life is unrepresentative of the religious world as a whole: Manning reacts with surprise to Holman's appearance - "(he) had none of that precise demureness ... which I had always imagined was the characteristic of a minister"¹⁰⁵ - and he notes throughout the untypicalness of Holman's outlook and activity. The author, that is, is presenting an ideal picture, but one which she recognizes as such. Holman represents Mrs. Gaskell's view of the possibility of a whole, religious life, rather than her view of religious actuality. And, importantly, this ideal is set in a rural world. Holman's style of life is distinctly patriarchal, recalling Old Testament originals: Brother Robinson's reference to Abraham is not inappropriate.¹⁰⁶ The Hope Farm is for the author a proper setting for such a life; Holman presides at the family table, leads the farm community's work and is the spiritual head as well: it is not an existence conceivable in the fragmented world of the industrial town. But Holman unites the daily, secular life of work and the religious life of worship - the day's efforts on the farm conclude with the singing of a psalm.¹⁰⁷ He unites, too, the world of

liberal learning and the world of the Bible, paying due devotion to each. He is, in Holdsworth's words, both "practical as well as reverend." And Holman is aware that such a unified life does not fit in the world of progress: his remark - "I dare say you railway gentlemen don't wind up the day with singing a psalm together" - expresses well both his and Mrs. Gaskell's sense of the way in which social change edges out religious belief from the centre of life.

Holdsworth is in many respects the antithesis of Holman, standing for change rather than stability, for the moving industrial world rather than a settled rural order; and it is in the contrast between these two men that the author's perceptions of religion and change are focussed. The railway is an apt symbol for Holdsworth's style of life; it first brings him into contact with the Holman family and then takes him on to new places and new people. His career is essentially one of movement - the opposite of Holman's rootedness in a specific place. And with this career go values which are appropriate to a life of change. Mrs. Gaskell presents him not as a superficial or emotionally trivial person, but as someone whose life makes inappropriate the older-style simplicity of the Holman household. It is inevitable that Phillis will misunderstand Holdsworth's attentions: her straightforwardness, her inability to take other than seriously what people say and do are a product of her upbringing in a small, intimate, and ordered world. Holdsworth acknowledges that the moral world of Hope Farm is not his own, and tries to adjust to it:

"... really it is very wholesome exercise, this trying to make one's words represent one's thoughts, instead of merely looking to their effect on others." 109

But it is in the nature of things that such adjustments are temporary. For Holdsworth, Hope Farm and Phillis are fleeting experiences in a fluid and fast-moving life; for Phillis, the emotional impact of her love for Holdsworth is profound and decisive.

Yet despite the separateness of the Holman and Holdsworth worlds, Mrs. Gaskell emphasizes the connection - the respect - between the two men. Holman is prepared to see Holdsworth as "an upright man"¹¹⁰ and is clearly fascinated by him - even if against his better nature. And for Holdsworth the minister, as he soon comes to call him, is a "good man" of "extraordinary intelligence".¹¹¹ The narrator's stance is balanced and regretful, expressing admiration for both men - and at the same time recognising the final incompatibility of the worlds they inhabit.

Phillis herself, of course, is the victim of this incompatibility, confused by her encounter - in Holdsworth - with a world she cannot understand. She is torn between the values of two worlds, rooted and living in one, pulled by love towards the other. In effect, she is a kind of Sleeping Beauty, as Holdsworth describes her,¹¹² living remote from what - through Manning's consciousness - we see as the real world of progressive activity. Finally, Phillis does not want to be awakened; the last paragraph of the tale shows her longing, against all reality, for a return to the "peace of the old days", and the narrative ends with her avowal "I can, and I will". It is a moment of the most profound irony, and Mrs. Gaskell effectively evokes the inescapability of change. Holdsworth, and Manning his admirer, belong to the secular, industrial world of the future; Phillis, and her family, inhabit a religious, rural world essentially of the past, one whose existence is palpably anachronistic in relation to the movement of nineteenth-century civilization. By ending the tale with Phillis's nostalgic words, Mrs. Gaskell makes all the more plain her own perception of the place of religion in a changing order: Holman's patriarchal piety has no role in the future world. The author's regret is unmistakeable; but in an unsettled world of social change religion as a cohesive, communal force is impossible. Cousin Phillis presents an ideal of religious wholeness - a glimpse of the once possible - but the real religious world is shown as a dying context, separated from and uninterested in the movement of

society. -

Few writers of her time can have been as immersed in the religious world as Mrs. Gaskell. Her religious experience and conviction quite clearly motivate and determine the direction of the novels discussed here, and her writing bears the stamp of her own religious particularity. A characteristically Unitarian optimism - believing in people's potentiality for good, their susceptibility to explanation, their resources for understanding and sympathy - pervades her fiction, much of it designed with the intention of spreading social understanding and thus increasing social harmony. Even where her novelist's observation reveals social or personal conflict, her liberal Christian instinct impels her towards a reconciling "solution". Her personal piety - unrelated, in a specifically Unitarian way, to any clear theory or system of belief - often determines the kind of solution, and she depends on uplifting emotion in a way which is distinctly reminiscent of the chapel world. But Mrs. Gaskell brings to her fiction an understanding of that world that appreciates the process of change which in her lifetime it was having to undergo. She illuminates the tensions between the impulse towards social advancement and the concern for religious principle which characterized it; and she is aware of social movement, which as well as bringing "progress" brings an increasing separation between the religious and secular spheres. The difference between Mary Barton (1848) and Cousin Phillis (1863-4) is interesting: in her first novel Mrs. Gaskell seems confident of the importance of the part to be played in the social world by religion, but in the later tale she sees the world of change leaving behind a religion which seems increasingly anachronistic. The process of secularization was one which she sensed and one which her changing fiction records.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 2.

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29. " " p. 696.
30. " " p. 70.
31. " " p. 221.
32. Mary Barton, ch. 35.
33. " " ch. 19 (cf. Rev. 7¹⁷)
34. " " ch. 19 (cf. Phil. 2²⁷)
35. " " ch. 14 (cf. I Kings 19¹²)
36. " " ch. 21 (cf. Matt 22¹³)
37. " " ch. 14
38. " " ch. 6.
39. " " ch. 12.
40. " " ch. 3.
41. " " ch. 3.
42. " " ch. 12.
43. " " ch. 12.
44. " " ch. 13.
45. " " ch. 33.
46. " " ch. 6.
47. " " ch. 22.
48. " " ch. 13.
49. " " ch. 20.
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52. Mary Barton, ch. 19.
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56. " " ch. 3.
57. " " ch. 6.
58. " " ch. 15.
59. " " ch. 36.
60. Ruth, ch. 14.
61. " ch. 19.
62. " ch. 17.
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64. " ch. 11.
65. " ch. 11.
66. " ch. 8.
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101. " " Pt. III (p. 267)
102. " " Pt. I (p. 219)
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108. *ibid.*
109. Cousin Phillis, Pt. II (p. 264)
110. " " Pt. II (p. 266)
111. " " Pt. II (p. 264)
112. " " Pt. III (p. 276).

CHAPTER III

The Treatment of Religion in the Early Fiction of George Eliot.

Mrs. Gaskell remained a Unitarian all her life and wrote from within a clearly-defined - if insecure - religious tradition. Her writing, that is, derives much of its impulse from her own religious conviction; and as well as relying on a traditional religious vocabulary - "sin" and "repentance" are terms she uses with confidence, if ambiguity - she assumes that her readers will share the religious emotion to which she turns at key moments in the novels. In her earlier novels particularly, she is writing "from faith to faith", deliberately working towards the creation of wider sympathies, a more charitable vision. Even in the later novels where there is less obvious pressure of religious recommendation, Mrs. Gaskell's own values, formed in the community of liberal Dissent, are clear. As religion was fundamental to her own outlook and to her social involvement, so it was decisive in her writing. And her treatment of the religious world reveals her awareness of the conflicts involved in religious change.

George Eliot's is in some respects a more representative case. Her own life exhibits a characteristic Victorian experience: the movement from Evangelicalism, through religious doubt fuelled by critical approaches to the Bible, to a humanism still generally religious in its aspiration; and her development has been seen as "a paradigm of (the century's) most decided trend". And yet religion remains central to George Eliot, and is seen in the fiction as an important factor in personal identity; though the writer's impulse is constantly towards offering a secular account of religious experience. Whilst recognising the importance of the religious world, that is, George Eliot does not accept a religious reading of it: instead, there is an attempt to reinterpret religious concerns and motivations in terms of a secular or humanistic outlook, one which derives largely from the Feuerbachian analysis. And despite her desire to "observe" the

religious world with detachment and accuracy,² the reader is constantly aware of the writer's interpretation, her moral-humanistic commitment: the decision to explore religion "solely in its human and not at all in its theological aspect"³ involves a persistent attempt to rewrite religious life from a secular viewpoint, even, at times, to dehistoricize it in the interests of an authorially-imposed moral solution. None the less, George Eliot's earlier fiction focusses seriously on the religious sphere and explores with some sensitivity the fundamental religious needs for relationship and identity. She does not directly confront the secularization process in her novels, but these novels themselves, offering secular accounts of religious conduct, may be seen as indicative of the secularizing movement of her lifetime.

By education, if not by family upbringing Marian Evans was Evangelical, and it will be useful to consider some of the main features of Evangelicalism as an introduction to the writer's early religious experience. Whatever the social and philanthropic impact of Evangelicalism - and Asa Briggs has seen what he refers to as "vital religion"⁴ as a key motif in nineteenth century history - its impact within the personal life was profound. It was the inner life of Evangelicalism that counted: "good works" might follow upon the experience of grace, but the soul's personal relation to God was fundamental. J.H. Newman recalled his early Evangelical conviction of "two and two only absolute and luminously self-evident beings, myself and my Creator",⁵ and this effectively characterizes the intense introspection of Evangelical piety. Calvinistic Evangelicalism further relied upon a vision of human depravity and divine wrath; as a basic Evangelical text, Wilberforce's "Practical View" put it:

We should not go too far if we were to assert that (the corruption of human nature) lies at the very root of all true Religion, and still more, that it is eminently the basis and groundwork of Christianity.⁶

Evangelicalism's insistence on sin and judgement created what W.E. Houghton has referred to as "a context of living fear",⁷ one in which the individual regarded himself as "a monster, a vile, base, stupid, obstinate and mischievous creature",⁸ subject of divine punishment and only to escape by divine grace. It is not, therefore, surprising that the conversion experience was central to Evangelical religion - for in conversion lay release from the guilt and despair so assiduously cultivated by the insistence on personal sin. Kitson-Clark remarks that Evangelical religion drew its power from conversion experiences;⁹ and the hymns of Evangelicalism reflect this centrality. John Newton's "Approach, my soul, the mercy seat" expresses guilt, fear and the promise of deliverance:

Bow'd down beneath a load of sin,
By Satan sorely press'd,
By war without and fears within,
I came to Thee for rest.¹⁰

- and deliverance is a main theme of some of the hymns cited by Kitson-Clark: "Jesu, lover of my soul", "Rock of ages", "Just as I am".¹¹ The intense moral seriousness which characterized the life of a "justified sinner" after the conversion experience is a response to the awfulness of man's situation as conceived according to what Halevy referred to as the "brutal simplicity"¹² of Evangelical theology; and that "moral seriousness" could become depression and neurosis is indicated by the case of William Cowper. Conversion, that is, was not always a complete or final release from guilt: Evangelical introspection thrived on the discovery of personal shortcomings and "lapses from grace", the constant reworking of the guilt-forgiveness movement.

The few surviving early letters indicate that Marian Evans was squarely in this Evangelical tradition. There is a constant self-awareness and self-deprecation which are authentic signs of "seriousness", and we never escape a sense of sin. Her biographer Gordon Haight seems if anything to underestimate the full rigour of Marian's Evangelicalism,

referring to what Maria Lewis inculcated in her as a "gentle
benevolence".¹³ The Calvinistic toughness of Marian Evans's adolescent
faith is clear, however, from the correspondence; from her admiration
of Cowper;¹⁴ and from her choice of periodical to which to send her
earliest writing: The Christian Observer, which published her lines on
saying farewell to the world, was the leading Calvinist Evangelical
paper. No account exists of the conversion experience which Marian
Evans underwent, but Charles Bray, himself to be one of the influences
in her rejection of Evangelicalism, described in his Autobiography what
he took to be "the usual process":

... a period of exceeding depression, followed by the
customary reaction when I began to feel myself among the elect...¹⁵

- and his description of the intense devotional life of the young
convert is relevant to Marian Evans's:

My religion was now my great delight In strict
accordance with my opinions I avoided general society in a
world to which I did not belong; to me it was "the unclean
thing."¹⁶

Bray is here recalling his nineteenth year; and approaching her
nineteenth birthday Marian Evans wrote, after being much impressed by
the Life of William Wilberforce:

May the Lord give me such an insight into what is truly
good and such realizing views of an approaching eternity,
that I may not rest contented with making Christianity a
mere addendum to my pursuits May I seek to be
sanctified wholly.¹⁷

Evangelical seriousness could scarcely be more fully exemplified.
And it shows itself, too, in the confession of egotism, the dismissal of
musical skill as "so useless ... an accomplishment" and the
recommendation of self-examination - "to commune with our own hearts"
- in this same letter. Other letters reinforce the picture. There
is self-obnegation - "my lack of humility and Christian simplicity";¹⁸
an emphasis on conscience;¹⁹ and a tendency to quote extensively from
Scripture or to allude to, or borrow, its characteristic phrasing.

Always, there is an awareness of "self" -

You see I have rolled again on the centre to which I
invariably gravitate ... 20

- which is at the same time an awareness of self's shortcomings:
against her "besetting sin" of ambition she sets up the virtue of
"humility" ²¹ - a characteristically self-distrustful and Evangelical
response.

Marian Evans made her rejection of orthodox Christian faith
public on January 2nd, 1842. What had led to this was her increasing
intellectual and moral dissatisfaction with what she had come to see as
the narrow falsehood of Evangelicalism, and her conversion from her
adolescent faith was a liberation into a wider and more profound world,
both socially and intellectually. Yet her rejection of orthodoxy did
not involve a complete severance; was not a rejection of her own past
self. What her correspondence indicates above all is the element of
continuity - Evangelicalism had ingrained habits of mind and outlook
which persisted, even if they had to be reinterpreted. Her letter to
her father of 28.2.1842 is forthright in its repudiation of Evangelical
doctrine, despite the writer's self-vindictory intention; and yet she
is equally concerned to emphasize her continued respect for "the moral
teaching of Jesus himself", "the laws of my Creator", and the moral
imperative "duty". ²² A letter of 1843 shows her reflecting on her
liberation from "the wretched giant's bed of dogmas", but at the same
time noting the need for continuity in the personal life, since
religious views, true or false, are so closely linked to the whole
personality. Her argument for development rather than radical
disruption has relevance to her own case:

... with individuals, as with nations, the only safe
revolution is one arising out of the wants which their own
progress has generated. 23

It is fair to suggest, therefore, that Marian Evans stood in an

ambiguous relation to the religious experiences of her adolescence; doctrinal constructions were rejected but there were continuities of feeling. If Evangelicalism had been put aside, there were distinctly religious impulses still at work; not just the Evangelical moral seriousness, but a spiritual yearning towards the central Christian value of love.

Again, the Letters are illustrative; while on the one hand she can dismiss the cultural narrowness of Evangelicalism,²⁴ laugh at the notion of a "converted medical gentleman" placing an advertisement in The Times,²⁵ and generally appear to have left behind the Evangelical trappings, on the other she reveals a continuing spiritual aspiration:

When shall I attain to the true spirit of love which Paul has taught for all the ages? 26

And this aspiration is one which she most characteristically expresses in Biblical language; her final greeting in a letter of 1848 naturally echoes the Scriptures which as an Evangelical she had known so well:

Farewell, Geliebte - may you be enabled to believe all things, hope all things and endure all things. 27

It was this continuing spirituality which lay behind her dissatisfaction with Strauss. The translation was for Marian Evans a "soul-stupefying labour" and she became, as she put it, "Strauss-sick" as a result of his relentlessly analytical approach, "dissecting the beautiful story of the crucifixion."²⁸ Strauss was profoundly uncongenial to her outlook because his approach threatened to destroy her emotional continuity. Marian's conversion from Evangelicalism had not involved a rejection of the New Testament, and its beauty and spiritual truth needed to be safeguarded; a letter of 1846 shows her reinterpreting the narrative of the journey to Emmaus in symbolic and non-mythical terms, and commenting "How universal ... its significance!"²⁹ The "Christ image",³⁰ that is, remained with her after her rejection of Evangelical orthodoxy, and she vigorously maintained a spiritual stance

against both self-proclaimed "infidelity" and the Evangelicalism which, as she later argued in her "Dr. Cumming" essay (1855), was in its doctrinalism both unspiritual and dishonest.

It was Ludwig Feuerbach's Essence of Christianity which was to provide for Marian Evans a satisfying reinterpretation of Christianity, one which both discarded orthodox doctrinalism and yet maintained and restated her own central conviction of the divinity of love. Feuerbach offered an intellectual framework for her personal commitment, providing in the Essence both a wholesale rejection of "The False or Theological Essence of Religion" and an endorsement of "The True or Anthropological Essence of Religion". While engaged on her translation, Marian Evans wrote in 1854: "With the ideas of Feuerbach I everywhere agree"³¹; but it seems that she was more moved by the positive aspects of his reinterpretation than by his negative analysis. Karl Marx, in his Theses on Feuerbach, writes that:

Feuerbach starts out from the fact of religious self-alienation, the duplication of the world into a religious-imaginary world and a real one. His work consists in the dissolution of the religious world into its secular basis.³²

- but this could scarcely have been Marian Evans's account of the Essence. Instead, it is more plausible to detect identity of thought between writer and translator at points in the work such as this, where Feuerbach writes on God and man:

Such as are a man's thoughts and dispositions, such is his God Consciousness of God is self-consciousness, knowledge of God is self-knowledge. By his God thou knowest the man, and by the man his God: the two are identical. Whatever is God to a man, that is his heart and soul: and, conversely, God is the manifested inward nature, the expressed self of a man.³³

This affirmation of the identity of God and man is one which Marian Evans took up in the "Dr. Cumming" essay of 1855; arguing that Cumming's Evangelical God works against morality, she asserts the moral force of God conceived as:

... sympathizing with the pure elements of human feeling, as possessing infinitely all those attributes which we recognise to be moral in humanity. 34

It is in this essay, too, that she affirms the supremacy of love, in clearly Feuerbachian terms; her own conviction, against Evangelicalism, is

... that mercy will ultimately triumph, - that God, i.e. Love, will be all in all. 35

Feuerbach's first section on "The Anthropological Essence of Religion" argues the goodness of human nature and the centrality of love: man is "conscious of love as the highest, the absolute power and truth".³⁶ It is the "substantial bond" between all being, he continues,

... a real love, a love which has flesh and blood, which vibrates as an almighty force through all living Love is God himself, and apart from it there is no God. 37

Marian Evans clearly found here an emphasis which echoed her own spiritual aspiration and which at the same time directed her attention to human relations, for in Feuerbach's view love is essentially mutual: "We can love only with another";³⁸ "Participated life is alone true, self-satisfying, divine life."³⁹ The emphasis on mutuality is developed at length, for mutuality is the key to humanity:

My fellow man is the bond between me and the world. I am, and I feel myself, dependent on the world, because I first feel myself dependent on other men. If I did not need man, I should not need the world Without other men, the world would be for me not only dead and empty, but meaningless. Only through his fellow does man become clear to himself and self-conscious; but only when I am clear to myself does the world become clear to me

The Ego, then, attains to consciousness of the world through consciousness of the thou ... 40

Feuerbach sees the I-thou relation, that is, as the key to both identity and community life:

In another I first have the consciousness of humanity; through him I first learn, I first feel that I am a man:

in my love for him it is first clear to me that he belongs to me and I to him, that we two cannot be without each other, that only community constitutes humanity. 41

The Feuerbach translation appeared in 1854 and just over two years later George Eliot published the first Scenes from Clerical Life. Behind her, the novelist had direct experience of Evangelicalism as well as a clear conviction of its nullity as a theological system; she retained religious impulses which made her respond to the religious, rather than anti-religious elements in Feuerbach; and she had found in him a reinterpretation rather than a dismissal of Christianity which did justice to the aspects of it she still valued. The early fiction shows her exploring the religious world from a secular viewpoint, and shows too in both its perceptions and its evasions the pressure of her own religious experiences and moral commitments.

The Sad Fortunes of the Rev. Amos Barton is a study of the change brought about in a clergyman by his belated discovery of the meaning of love - the value for which, in theory, his religion stands. But the tale recounts a human transformation rather than a religious one, and from the outset George Eliot's secular, almost sociological viewpoint is clear. Her portrait of Shepperton in the 1830's observes clerical life with an eye to its social manners - the Clerical Meeting (Ch.6) is a fine scene of ironic comedy - and it is Amos Barton's social situation which is her first interest. Barton's obligations are to "Establishment" and "gentility", and he has to satisfy the social expectations of both his parishioners and his fellow clergy on a wholly inadequate stipend. This economic predicament remains for him an unavoidable concern:

By what process of division can the sum of eighty pounds per annum be made to yield a quotient that will cover that man's weekly expenses? This was the problem presented by the position of the Rev. Amos Barton, as curate of Shepperton.... 42

Barton's religious teaching remains a mystery to his parishioners

- Mrs. Patten, for instance, remarks that she has "never been a sinner"
 - but his social tactlessness is clear; he interferes with the marriage ceremonial, sniffs in public and becomes seen as "a low bred fellow."
 George Eliot does identify Barton's religious pedigree for her readers
 - he is a firm Evangelical defined by his allegiance to Simeon and Newton, and "The Record"⁴⁴ - but to his parishioners he is defined not by doctrine but by social behaviour. His religious innovations are not understood; his introduction of tract-distribution is dismissively treated by Mrs. Patten:

"I never dagged my petticoats in my life, and I've no opinion of that sort o' religion." ⁴⁵

- and the only lasting impact of his curacy is seen in the rebuilding of the church, a change presented by the writer as having little to do with genuine religious impulses.

If Shepperton as a whole is unchanged as a result of the coming of Evangelicalism in Barton, the human irrelevance of doctrine is most clearly revealed in George Eliot's treatment of the relationship of Amos and Milly. They are, almost, case studies in the Feuerbachian interpretation of religion. Barton himself epitomises human limitedness in his inability to relate to others - crucially, his wife - in any genuine way. His doctrine may be Evangelically correct, but he is incapable of love, and has been unable to discover himself through discovering mutuality. The Barton family derives its strength and its experience of love from Milly, not Amos; and it is Milly, whose "religion" is doctrinally imprecise, who offers openness and warmth, a creative mutuality.

George Eliot's authorial stance is interesting as an element in her moral recommendation in this respect. The fiction makes clear Amos Barton's emotional, moral and imaginative limitations, but the

writer's commitment to human tolerance prompts her authorial intervention on his behalf:

"Alas for the worthy man who ... gets himself into the wrong place. It is only the very largest souls who will be able to appreciate and pity him - who will discern and love sincerity of purpose amid all the bungling feebleness of achievement." ⁴⁶

The comment is needed as a counterbalance to the unrelieved bleakness of the author's fictional presentation of Barton. Away from the influence of Milly in the pursuit of his pastoral duties, he is seen as exemplifying the worst possible Evangelical negations: and in the workhouse scene it is difficult for the reader to remember "sincerity of purpose", despite the author's prompting.

Here, George Eliot effectively pillories the doctrinalism of Evangelical religion, its carefully structured hatred. The workhouse inmates are presented as "withered souls" in need of human warmth; and the "February chill" deftly evokes both the barrenness of their condition and of Barton's heart. ⁴⁷ His religious approach here recalls Feuerbach's dictum "By his God thou knowest the man"; ⁴⁸ evangelism is seen as contrived destructiveness. Mrs. Brick's empty snuff box prompts the remark:

"Ah, well! You'll soon be going where there is no more snuff. You'll be in need of mercy then. You must remember that you may have to seek for mercy and not find it, just as you're seeking for snuff." ⁴⁹

And the full anti-humanity of Barton's approach is emphasized as he threatens young Fodge with hellfire:

"... if you are naughty, God will be angry, as well as Mr. Spratt: and God can burn you for ever. That will be worse than being beaten." ⁵⁰

Barton's life and doctrine are of a piece, his doctrinal Evangelicalism being the equivalent of his personal unawareness of love. Insensitive, even brutal in his dismissiveness of other lives, he has clearly not been awakened to consciousness of himself or the

world "through relationship with a thou":⁵¹ only narrowly does Barton retain any sympathy within the fiction here.

If Barton's religion is seen as inhumanly negative, Milly remains the embodiment of outgoing love. What, of course, is fictionally unsatisfactory about this is that husband and wife simply live in different moral worlds. Accepting, tolerant, gentle, self-giving, Milly is the practical antithesis of Amos, and the reader looks in vain for any hint about how these so utterly different people came to share a married life. Milly exemplifies one of the essential Christian values as seen by Feuerbach - "To suffer for others is divine"⁵² - and her "religion" is appropriately a reversal of Amos's: instead of believing in a punishing God, Milly's

... heart so overflowed with love, she felt sure she was near a fountain of love that would care for husband and babes better than she could foresee⁵³

And Milly's self-giving life ends in a death which is almost sacrificial - certainly in one which is the cause of a moral regeneration in Amos. George Eliot is offering a secularized equivalent of the Christ story: the self-giving life ends prematurely, tragically - and a kind of "salvation" appears as the result of reflection upon the meaning of the life and death. The effective centre of Amos Barton appears in the death of Milly and its consequences, and the unsatisfactory Countess Czerlaski episodes recede into the background as George Eliot's fictional energies are fully engaged.

Milly's death is managed with great skill by the writer, and her attention is concentrated on the moral effects this has on Amos. His wife's decline begins to force Barton towards emotions which previously he had not even contemplated; his "dry, despairing eyes" from which soon "the pent-up fountain of tears"⁵⁴ is to come reveal the clergyman having to cope with an experience of personal suffering which is also

to be seen as one of emotional growth. The death of Milly points perhaps most fully to the ultimate separation of the married couple. It is a moment when the dying woman's fulfillment - her gratitude to her family, to life - is felt as the moral antithesis of Barton's own unfulfilled self. Milly's charge to her daughter Patty -

"Love your Papa. Comfort him; and take care of your
little brothers and sisters. God will help you." ⁵⁵

- is a reminder that Milly's God is not Barton's. Amos would not grasp the Feuerbachian reversal - "Love is God" ⁵⁶ - but Milly enacts it. What now begins to happen to Barton is that he discovers something about human emotions which his orthodox religion could never have taught him; his Evangelical views had emphasized human separation, salvation for the few and damnation for the many, but he now learns through his personal suffering something about human relatedness. Barton now for the first time is seen reflecting on another, and discovering as a result some self-awareness:

... now he relived all their life together, with that terrible keenness of memory and imagination which bereavement gives, and he felt as if his very love needed a pardon for its poverty and selfishness. ⁵⁷

By the end of the tale Barton has become more human; instead of responding to his wife's death religiously, he responds humanly. And George Eliot's point is that Milly's death leads to an opening up of Barton's other relationships as well. Previously seen by his parishioners as irrelevant to their real lives, he now begins to be regarded as a fellow-man - a human link has been established.

Amos Barton is, then, a demonstration of a Feuerbachian thesis - the transcendent and transforming power of love. George Eliot firmly keeps the tale on a human level; Amos, even at his moments of most profound grief, reacts without any appeal to a supernatural God and instead "prays" to his departed wife. ⁵⁸ Certainly he experiences no

consolation of religious hope - and the end of the tale finds him "much changed":⁵⁹ by implication, perhaps, no longer so sure of the Evangelical certainties. In so far as Evangelicalism embodies a life-denying hatred, it is here rejected, and the author offers as its alternative the warm human love which breaks through the circle of self and makes relationship and community possible. The skill with which this is managed is considerable; the tale is effective as a demonstration without being schematized, and in particular Amos himself is well handled: a bad clergyman, an insensitive husband, an unappealing "hero" altogether, he remains humanly interesting, and his moral development is convincing. But there must be reservations about the oddly static conclusion to which the story moves. As a whole, the tale has been set against a background of change - Barton's Evangelicalism has meant changes in social custom, the church has been rebuilt, Barton himself moves from the relative quietness of Shepperton to "a large manufacturing town" - but the final scene becomes a tableau:

Patty alone remains by her father's side, and makes the evening sunshine of his life.⁶⁰

Here, the metaphorical "evening sunshine" has a fixed, pictorial quality about it, as if the "scene", once moving, has been arbitrarily and too cosily stopped at that point. George Eliot has demonstrated her interest in religious change seen as a social phenomenon and in moral change seen as an inner, personal development; but the final impression is one which reminds the reader of the imaginative Toryism of the tale's opening. A "fond sadness" of memory, a preference for "old quaintness",⁶¹ an impulse to stop the movement of time, remain.

It is this same imaginative cosiness which is the central weakness of Mr. Gilfil's Love Story, the least successful of the Scenes. Gilfil is presented as a clergyman effectively without religious views, seen by his parishioners as belonging to the "course of nature."⁶² Religious

life is treated unsatisfactorily in this tale: there was a time, the writer suggests, when churchgoing was part of an agreeable, rural order and the church service a communal celebration of its values: "a simple weekly tribute to what they knew of good and right." ⁶³ Both Gilfil himself and the society he serves are seen through a nostalgic haze; the people are simple and contented, and Gilfil's teaching amounts

to little more than an expansion of the concise thesis, that those who do wrong will find it the worse for them, and those who do well will find it the better for them. ⁶⁴

It is interesting that Gilfil is both a far nicer and a less sympathetic character than Barton; for all his generalized moral benevolence and popularity, he remains an unattractive portrait. Barton, by contrast, is both unpleasant and interesting - the writer's imagination presenting his emotional growth with effectiveness. And the narrative line of Mr. Gilfil is equally unsatisfactory. George Eliot contrives to shape the story so as to centre it on Caterina's discovery of a dependent relationship with Gilfil; but the moment of her moral regeneration - a kind of secular conversion - is sentimentally handled:

She paused, and burst into tears Maynard could not help hurrying towards her, putting his arm around her, and leaning down to kiss her hair. She nestled to him, and put up her little mouth to be kissed. The delicate-tendrilled plant must have something to cling to. The soul that was born anew to music was born anew to love. ⁶⁵

The fiction simply does not embody the moral theme - the idea of growth through love - and the tale's failure may be blamed on the author's sentimental idealization of a rural, religious past. It was a feature later to debilitate Adam Bede.

Like the two earlier Scenes, Janet's Repentance is also concerned with moral change. But here George Eliot is dealing not with a secular analogue to religious conversion but with religious conversion itself; and what is remarkable is the openness of the writer's

treatment. The tale is a finely-balanced fiction which can be read equally as an endorsement of Evangelical values and as a secular interpretation of them; and the author is throughout positive and appreciative towards a theological movement which in Amos Barton she had seen as humanly destructive. The tale points to a religious continuity in the life of George Eliot - the extent to which she was able to see the essential "seriousness" of Evangelicalism as containing life-giving possibilities.

George Eliot herself saw the issue in the tale as one between religion and irreligion,⁶⁶ and the positive force of Tryan's Evangelicalism is partly seen by contrast with Dempster's morally empty advocacy of "True Religion". Dempster embodies the reverse of all George Eliot's moral positives. Ignorant, bullying, arrogant, his defence of "orthodoxy" is inseparable from a self-righteousness which is at the same time moral blindness; the authorial comment at the conclusion of Mr. Gilfil's Love Story conveys well George Eliot's valuation:

... if we knew ourselves, we should not judge each other harshly.⁶⁷

Dempster's public aggressiveness is the outcome, that is, of his lack of self-knowledge; and, in Feuerbachian terms he remains unaware of the possibility of "participated life".⁶⁸ His domestic violence towards Janet is offered by the writer as a further symptom of his moral condition, one whose full significance is realized in the light of Feuerbach's view that the marriage relationship most fully expresses mutuality.⁶⁹ George Eliot's presentation of Dempster is relentlessly harsh - his support of "principles", "sound religion and manly morality", his conviction that his own heart is "sound to the core", all come to the reader with chilling irony. There are no saving graces, no seeds of moral growth. When the one human link which

Dempster respects is broken at his mother's death, "his good angel ...
 took flight for ever",⁷⁰ and the author deliberately chooses images of
 irreversible change to describe his condition; Dempster is "an organ
 hardening by disease", the "deep-down fibrous roots of human love and
 goodness" are killed.⁷¹ George Eliot renders with skill and power the
 moral and finally psychic disintegration of Dempster, and he is seen
 as an example of the possibility of self-chosen perdition. He destroys
 himself by the negation of all relationship, and on his deathbed reveals
 the nature of hell: for all her moral tolerance, George Eliot's secular
 vision contains not only a possible salvation, but also here a possible
 damnation.

It is against this stern evocation of destructive inhumanity in
 Dempster that the creative force of Tryan's Evangelicalism stands out.
 And the Milby into which Tryan brings his gospel is seen as lacking the
 moral seriousness he represents. Milby is pervasively self-contented,
 its church life little more than a social exercise:

... few places could present a more brilliant show of
 out-door toilettes than might be seen issuing from Milby
 church at one o'clock. ⁷²

Though the irony here is gentle rather than condemnatory, George
 Eliot sees Milby needing - as well as resenting - a challenge to its
 complacency. And from the first, Evangelicalism represents social
 disruption, altering the tone and purpose of individual lives, even if
 its spread is ironically viewed:

Evangelicalism was no longer a nuisance existing merely in
 by-corners, which any well-clad person could avoid; it was
 invading the very drawing rooms, mingling itself with the
 comfortable fumes of port-wine and brandy. ⁷³

The moral implications of the movement are, in fact, profound: and
 George Eliot sees the impact of the new gospel working towards an
 enlargement of moral - and thus social-awareness. Even if in the case
 of Rebecca Linnett moral growth shows itself simply as "a softened

light over her person",⁷⁴ in the community as a whole there is a growth in consciousness of others which is for the author sufficiently important to prompt a long and decisive intervention in the narrative:

... Evangelicalism had brought into palpable existence and operation in Milby society that idea of duty, that recognition of something to be lived for beyond the mere satisfaction of self, which is to the moral self what the great central ganglion is to animal life. No man can begin to mould himself on a faith or an idea without rising to a higher order of experience: a principle of subordination, of self-mastery, has been introduced into his nature⁷⁵

Evangelical seriousness, in effect, is being seen as a factor in moral advance; Tryan himself is engaged in "that blessed work of helping the world forward."⁷⁶ It is a startling portrait from the author of "Evangelical Teaching." Yet it is worth noting the implied social conservatism here: Tryan teaches resignation to the poor, and his gospel focusses on the personal sins, the "selfish desires"⁷⁷ of individuals. George Eliot's notions of moral change and advance remain a secular equivalent of the Evangelical gospel of personal conversion. And there is no mistaking her sympathy for Tryan's work; in offering "something to reverence" - what the writer sees as one of the "conditions of human goodness" - he communicates with Milby people at a humanly real level which Barton could never have achieved in Shepperton:

... their hearts inclined towards the new preacher as a messenger from God.⁷⁸

The whole tale works, of course, towards the moment of Janet's conversion and the subsequent short period in which she displays a "regenerated" life, and it is at this point that George Eliot achieves the ambiguity of presentation previously referred to. There is uncertainty rather than ambiguity, however, in the treatment of Janet's alcoholism which prepares for her conversion. In one way, Janet's "repentance" is a deliverance from the addiction which she

characteristically refers to in terms of "temptation", "craving" and "the demon".⁷⁹ But more profoundly, the "repentance" refers not to this particular "sin" - awkwardly dealt with by the writer - but with the whole movement of personality by which, under Tryan's influence, she is liberated from an oppressive sense of personal guilt into a positive and trusting relationship with him which equally involves her own self-acceptance. She sought release not simply from "sin" but also from the "self-despair" which isolates:⁸⁰ and discovering in Tryan a person who has also suffered, she is able, too, to find a relationship which creates mutuality. Such, at least, is the secular reading of what is also effectively presented as a religious moment. If there is a major weakness here, it is in the melodramatic account of Tryan's own past "sins"; but the presence of Tryan's religious ideal - the suffering and sharing Christ - is effectively evoked in the dialogue as a genuine influence in his own life. And Tryan's counselling of Janet; interestingly, involves no doctrinalism: the central appeal he makes is to a sharing with the human Christ:

"... carry that difficulty to the Saviour along with all your other sins and weaknesses He enters into your struggles; he has drunk the cup of our suffering to the dregs; he knows the hard wrestling it costs us to say, "Not my will, but thine, be done.""⁸¹

George Eliot makes no reservations about this; on the contrary, Janet's response carries the full weight of the end of the scene:

"Pray with me," said Janet - "pray how that I may have light and strength."⁸²

It is only in the next chapter that the author begins to reinterpret what has been presented in the fiction as a religious conversion. Here, Janet's renewal is described in terms of the "Blessed influence of one true loving soul on another"⁸³ - the secular essence of the religious experience is revealed. And, as the relationship continues, both Tryan and Janet blossom through the experience of love, sublimated

perhaps but nonetheless "a real love, a love which has flesh and blood", in Feuerbach's terms. Which ever view is taken, the Evangelical or the Feuerbachian, Tryan's presence and ministry are equally "saving", equally creative of new possibilities of living:

The commonest things seemed to touch the spring of love within her A door had been opened in Janet's cold, dark prison of self-despair, and the golden light of morning was pouring in its slanting beams 84

Images of liberation and transfiguration here evoke biblical originals - even the hymns of Evangelicalism; it is clear that, however interpreted, Tryan's gospel works.

There are few reservations about Evangelicalism in this tale; the genuineness of Janet's conversion has greater fictional emphasis than George Eliot's remark that "... some of Mr. Tryan's hearers had gained a religious vocabulary rather than religious experience." 86 And, surprisingly, the writer often uses religious terms which give an oddly committed tone to her authorial commentary; Mrs. Rayner's "faith and spiritual comforts", her belief in "eternal love", for instance, are rendered sympathetically by George Eliot, and Janet's own self-communing seems to enunciate an outlook endorsed by the writer: 87

The Divine Presence did not now seem far off, where she had not wings to reach it; prayer itself seemed superfluous in those moments of calm trust yes; infinite love was caring for her. 88

Yet there is a subtle reinterpretation going on here; George Eliot carefully avoids phrasing Janet's thoughts in specifically Evangelical language and the final effect is one of generalized spirituality. A similar, equally subtle re-emphasis takes place in the last two chapters of the tale. The "sacred kiss of promise" which Tryan and Janet exchange hints towards some heavenly afterlife of fulfillment, and the sun breaks from behind the clouds at the words "I am the Resurrection and the Life." But Janet sees her future life as one of 89 90

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"resigned memory", not hope of heaven; and she becomes here something different from an orthodox Evangelical; George Eliot's sympathy for the creative aspects of Evangelicalism does not prevent her from making the necessary dissociations clear;

Scenes of Clerical Life offers a secular account of religious life which concentrates on individual regeneration through the power of love; Creative impulses in religion are endorsed, negative ones rejected; and the fiction is designed to display the "true, or anthropological essence of religion". George Eliot understands the personal importance of religious experience, but the tales are not without their evasions - the idealizing of a religious past, for instance, and the tendency to "interpret" her characters' spirituality so that it is in line with her own convictions. And it is this last factor which weakens the treatment of Dissent in the Scenes. The term "clerical" does, of course, refer to clergymen of the Established church, but Dissenters do appear, and George Eliot seems either to treat them with ironic dismissiveness - the Independent meeting at New Sion in Mr. Gilfil provides the opportunity for a gibe about Dissent's fissile and sectarian tendencies - or to distort the specificity of their Dissent. 92
Mr. Jerome in Janet's Repentance, for example, is seen as a proponent of "truth and goodness", who became a Dissenter because "Dissent seemed to have the balance of piety, purity and good works on its side." 93
It is a portrait which lacks convincingness, since it fails to recognise the specific identity of Independency, and suggests that religious affiliation is a simple matter of informed moral choice. Jerome - and Dissent - are accepted in the tale only because, supporting Tryan, they demonstrate their adherence to serious values with which the author herself sympathizes.

But that the author does sympathize with what she sees as the

positive elements in the religious outlook remains clear. It is a point emphasized in a letter of 1859 to M. D'Albert-Durade:

I have no longer any antagonism towards any faith in which human sorrow and human longing for purity have expressed themselves; on the contrary I have a sympathy with it that predominates over all argumentative tendencies ... and I have the profoundest interest in the inward life of sincere Christians in all ages on many points where I used to delight in expressing intellectual difference, I now delight in feeling an emotional agreement. 94

Adam Bede shows George Eliot expressing in fiction both emotional agreement and intellectual difference, however; and this ambivalence in the presentation of religion is a source of weakness in the novel. Here, for the first time, she offers a study of the Dissenting world, in which Methodism is seen both as a source of Dinah's moral strength - a valid expression of the "human longing for purity" - and as a system which contains negative and destructive elements. In making both her agreement and her reservations clear, the author involves herself in a reinterpretation of religious motivation which is less subtle than that of the Scenes, and in a dehistoricization of particular religious contexts which is equally unsatisfactory. And in Adam Bede there is a greater sense of the author's imposition: less sure, perhaps, of the self-validating quality of the fiction, its effective embodiment of Feuerbachian views, George Eliot makes her authorial presence felt as commentator, explicator and even teacher.

It is clear that George Eliot made every effort to ground the novel in historical actuality. Her own direct experience of Methodism was limited, and though her aunt had achieved some fame within the connection for her evangelistic work, it seems that aunt and niece 95 had not been particularly close since 1839 or 1840. A letter to her uncle of 1840 shows Marian Evans using biblical language and allusion in much the same way as Seth and Dinah, but such distant experience was 96

inadequate for the novelist: George Eliot made a careful study of Wesley's life and teaching in preparation for Adam Bede, and her concern for accuracy is further shown by her interest in journals from the 1790's.⁹⁷ Yet despite this care of preparation, and the firm setting of the novel at a precise historial moment, the effect is less one of history than of idealization. When, for instance, Dinah remembers John Wesley, it is with idealizing reminiscence:

"I remember his face well: he was a very old man, and had very long white hair; his voice was very soft and beautiful, not like any voice I had heard before."⁹⁸

And George Eliot herself recalls with regret the religion of "half a century ago", when

there was yet a lingering after-glow from the time when Wesley and his fellow-labourer fed on the hips and haws of the Cornwall hedges, after exhausting limb and lungs in carrying a divine message to the poor.⁹⁹

In reminding her readers that early Methodism is not to be identified with its mid-nineteenth century version - "low-pitched gables up dingy streets, sleek grocers, sponging preachers and hypocritical jargon"¹⁰⁰ - George Eliot offers a sentimentalized view of the religious past, one in which the religion of Wesley, with its violent emotionalism and insistence on sudden conversion, becomes transmuted into an uplifting cultural influence:

... a crowd of rough men and weary-hearted women drank in a faith which was a rudimentary culture, which linked their thoughts with the past, lifted their own imagination above the sordid details of their own narrow lives, and suffused their souls with the sense of a pitying, loving, infinite Presence¹⁰¹

Methodism here is being drastically rewritten, and the author's assurance - "... it is possible ... to have very erroneous theories and very sublime feelings"¹⁰² - is a bland and condescending attempt to justify the selective idealization she is engaged in.

Her treatment of the Established church in the late eighteenth

century is no less sentimental in its effect. The chapter entitled "Church" (ch. 18) continues the nostalgic presentation I have previously noted in Mr. Gilfil, and to this is added the prevailing picturesqueness which characterizes George Eliot's nature description in Adam Bede:

You might have known it was Sunday if you had only waked up in the farm-yard. The cocks and hens seemed to know it, and made only crooning, subdued noises; the very bulldog looked less savage, as if he would have been satisfied with a smaller bite than usual. The sunshine seemed to call all things to rest and not to labour; it was asleep itself on the moss-grown cowshed; on the group of white ducks nestling together with their bills tucked under their wings 103

This careful rhetoric continues once the scene moves inside the church:

... the effect must have been warm and cheering when Mr. Irwine was in the desk, looking benignly round on that simple congregation - on the hardy old men, with bent knees and shoulders perhaps, but with vigour left for much hedge-clipping and thatching; on the tall stalwart frames and roughly-cut bronzed faces of the stone-cutters and carpenters; on the half-dozen well-to-do farmers, with their apple-checked families 104

- and the sentimentalizing process is clear. Detail is highlighted for the reader as in a carefully-painted canvas - "hardy" old men, "stalwart" frames, "apple-checked" families - but the effect is of a contrived tableau, seen through a nostalgic haze. And the scene has the force of the author's recommendation behind it; Irwine's "benign" look around his "simple" congregation is endorsed, and the separation of religious ideas and religious feeling is emphasized as the congregation follow the service "without any very clear comprehension" but with "simple faith." 105

Irvine himself is part of this sentimental picture, but there are points at which the fiction works against him. In the scene just referred to his paternalistic approach seems to have the author's approval, and her own ideas of the importance of religious emotion are echoed in his:

... he would perhaps have said that the only healthy form

religion could take in such minds was that of certain dim but strong emotions suffusing themselves as a hallowing influence over the family affections and neighbourly duties. 106

Again, Irwine's tolerance of the Methodists is seen as a positive quality - in line with the author's sympathy for genuine religious feeling - but his apparent lack of positive conviction is not just tolerance: it becomes indifference. Irwine in fact has very little to offer his people - and they are more likely to find help and sharing from Dinah. Indeed, the only close relationship he has outside his family, with Arthur Donnithorne, appears in the narrative to have contributed to Donnithorne's moral irresponsibility; certainly, at the Health Drinking Irwine emphasizes his own moral influence over Donnithorne, and the fiction shows the young squire devoid of any sense of mutuality. While she generally endorses an idealized picture of the church in Adam Bede, that is, George Eliot remains awkwardly aware of the inadequacies of Irwine as a minister - and sees the Methodists, particularly Dinah, offering more genuinely human concern at moments of crisis.

It is, however, in her treatment of Dinah that the author's ambivalence about religion is most clearly seen. Portrayed both as a Methodist and as a humanitarian - one who fully understands the meaning of love - she embodies contradictions which George Eliot does not finally resolve. Dinah's sermon on the green at Hayslope brings out this uncertainty most clearly. When she first appears, the author emphasizes her outgoing love -

... there was no keenness in her eyes; they seemed rather to be shedding love than to be making observations. 107

- but it is in the same scene that another aspect of Dinah is revealed, as she ruthlessly hounds Bessy Cranage in an attempt to push her to the hysteria which will result in conversion. Dinah, importantly, preaches

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from Wesley's text, and her sermon follows his general advice to preachers on how most effectively to combine promises of heaven and threats of hell. The sermon, that is, offers a more honest account of Methodism than the idealized one which is presented elsewhere in the novel. But a complete Methodism is unacceptable to George Eliot, and in her portrayal of Dinah as preacher she is attempting to fuse incompatible elements. The first part of the sermon emphasises love and the incarnation: Christ "has showed us what God's heart is, what are his feelings towards us" ¹⁰⁹ - and Dinah's words might almost be Feuerbach's: "The incarnation has no other significance ... than the indubitable certitude of the love of God to man." ¹¹⁰ But when Dinah speaks of "The Lost! Sinners!" ¹¹¹ she abandons love for judgement, and George Eliot turns her - the change is hard to take - into an advocate of a gospel of hate. It is clear that the author could not continue to present this negative aspect in a character who had her full sympathy; and what happens is that Dinah is portrayed from this point onwards not as a full-blooded Methodist, but as a humanitarian; The Feuerbachian reinterpretation is going on, that is, offering a secular account of what George Eliot sees as the positive essence of Dinah's religion;

It is Dinah's capacity to offer outgoing love that is most emphasized; As Mrs. Poyser says, she is "one that is allays welcome in trouble, Methodist or no Methodist": ¹¹² she is valued as a person, not as a religious adherent. And when she is seen at prayer, her piety is generalized, rather than specifically Methodist. Like Janet in Janet's Repentance she is shown as thinking of "the Divine Presence", experiencing prayer not as petition but as silence. In both cases, George Eliot is carefully shifting her characters away from precise doctrinal commitment:

That was often Dinah's way of praying in solitude. Simply

to close her eyes, and to feel herself inclosed by the Divine Presence." ¹¹³

As the novel continues, Dinah's religion becomes more generalized, and it is fictionally convenient that Methodist Conference decides against women preaching: the Dinah of the end of Adam Bede would not want to preach Methodist sermons. Certainly, the letter she writes to Seth is not recognisably a Methodist letter; ¹¹⁴ whereas in the early chapters of the book they have both shared a religious language, biblical in style and allusion, Dinah's letter with its reference to the suffering of "Infinite Love" recalls Feyerbach rather than Wesley.

George Eliot's account of Methodism is, then, characterized by a more complete reinterpretation than she brought to bear on Evangelicalism in the Scenes. Only by removing Dinah's religion from a specifically recognisable Methodist context can the author endorse it. And her final judgement on Methodism seems dismissive. If, early in the novel, the first Methodists were seen as "carrying a divine message to the poor", ¹¹⁵ by the end it has been made clear that in Hayslope, Methodism is an attempted intrusion, lacking communal roots, peripheral to the real concerns of the community. The "religious feeling" is most fully shared in the rituals of the Established church. And Seth Bede seems to stand - in contrast to Adam - as an example of the weakness of Methodist attitudes. The line of the narrative firmly discards Seth; his love for Dinah is seen as ineffectual and he is left, virtually emasculated at the end of the novel, to find quasi-fatherhood in Adam and Dinah's home.

George Eliot manages to dissociate herself from those aspects of Methodism which she sees as negative, but Adam Bede shows her in her role as author adopting, in her treatment of Hetty, attitudes of moral condemnation which are strangely reminiscent of the second half of Dinah's sermon. This is a further uncertainty in the novel. The

Scenes display ideas of salvation through love - both Amos Barton and Janet are in different ways and to different degrees regenerated; but, in Janet's Repentance there is also a vision of damnation in Dempster. In a Calvinistic way, he is presented as irrevocably bound for hell by his rejection of all loving impulse, predestined and irredeemable. Hetty, in Adam Bede, is similarly presented as beyond redemption. From her first appearance there is an unrelenting emphasis on her self-absorption; she

... often took the opportunity, when her aunt's back was turned, of looking at the pleasing reflection of herself in those polished surfaces. 116

And to others in the novel she is constantly seen as a "thing" rather than a person. The author, too, in her frequent use of animal imagery for Hetty, is engaged in the process of depersonalising her; as if her sheer physical beauty is a token of moral nonentity, she is seen by her creator as a "little, trivial soul." 117 Nor is it just George Eliot's authorial condemnation which negates Hetty. Society, in the novel, acts out the condemnatory process, and Hetty, having been the victim of Donnithorne's exploitation, is later the victim of the legal system. The writer's account of the execution day brings out the communal eagerness for Hetty's destruction -

The people were astir already, moving rapidly in one direction, through the streets. 118

- and there is an appropriate ambivalence about the moment of Donnithorne's arrival with the reprieve; what George Eliot offers as a "shout of sudden excitement" is felt by Hetty as a "shout of execration". 119

Despite her own avowal of the need for compassion, tolerance and acceptance, that is, George Eliot's fiction here enacts a ruthless dismissal of Hetty, who is seen to have insufficient humanity to warrant salvation. The bland authorial morality -

"These fellow-mortals, every one, must be accepted as they are ... it is these people ... that it is needful you should tolerate, pity and love." ¹²⁰

- is denied in the fiction. But Hetty, nonetheless, does have a life of her own which works, as it were, against the author's intention. Hetty's "confession" to Dinah is the most moving scene in the novel: we come, that is, closer to Hetty as she narrates her search for Donnithorne and her abandoning of her child than we do to anyone else in Adam Bede. The writing at this point loses its idealizing, picturesque tendency and presents human actuality. Hetty's "confession" ¹²¹ centres on her isolation - "I couldn't bear to be so lonely" - and this is felt as, in effect, a judgement on the social order which has alienated her, denied her mutuality. When Dinah becomes for Hetty ¹²² "the only visible sign of love and pity", George Eliot is to some extent relenting; at least Dinah recognizes Hetty's humanity. But the narrative line works finally to exclude Hetty. Having responded to her sexual self-giving with destructive malice, society forces her into the self-negation which is the abandonment of her child; and, though reprieved, she is finally transported. Nor does George Eliot as author bring her back: Arthur eventually returns and is accepted, but there is no place in society for Hetty.

There are, then, confusions in the treatment of Hetty which go back to uncertainties in George Eliot's religious outlook. There seems to be a lingering Calvinistic view which predestines Hetty to damnation as a "trivial soul", an irredeemable egoist. Yet there is also the compassionate impulse which presents her as a pitiable victim, to be loved and accepted. Another irony is that Hetty is the one character in Adam Bede who experiences creative sexuality, who gives herself with, in Feuerbach's words, "a real love, a love which has flesh and blood." ¹²³

By comparison with Hetty's sexuality, the love of Adam and Dinah is pale, more domestic, even cosy. And it is in the union of these

two that we approach the centre of George Eliot's recommendation in the novel. Adam is an idealized figure, both as stalwart, independent workman and as religious believer. The author presents him as profoundly pious, but his piety is non-doctrinal; he has an instinctive natural reverence which is the embodiment of religious feeling, seen as more valid in the novel than Seth's concern with religious ideas. At one level this is a theological contrast: Adam sees God in nature, Seth sees God through grace; Adam relies on works, Seth trusts to faith. Adam's belief in the old idea that "God helps them as help ¹²⁴ theirsens" is far from Seth's Methodist conviction of the need for repentance and conversion. More important than this contrast, though, is George Eliot's endorsement in Adam of what are her own views. Adam becomes a vehicle for the author's moral - religious didacticism; and in Chapter 17 - one which has less to do with the novel than with the author's didactic intention - he offers, in the tone of the homespun philosopher, sentiments which are more properly hers:

"I've seen pretty clear, ever since I was a young 'un, as religion's something else beside notions. It isn't notions sets people doing the right things, it's feelings." 125

Adam embodies religious feeling, and Dinah is in the novel an embodiment not of Methodism but of outgoing love. Together, they become, as it were, a union of George Eliot's religious convictions. And it is interesting to notice the way in which their marriage is prepared for, their religious complementariness achieved. Adam becomes during the course of the novel a far more obviously "religious" person, attending more carefully to religious devotion; while Dinah, as I have tried to show, is less and less the Methodist as the narrative continues. Their marriage brings together qualities and approaches which fuse into a religious ideal for the author.

It is perhaps this obvious recommendation which most marks the change in George Eliot's treatment of religion between Scenes and Adam Bede. In the novel, a solution is imposed which distorts religious

specificity while conveying the author's conviction; in the earlier tales, in contrast, the presentation of religious belief is more objective, un-distorting, and the author's own religious points are made more subtly. Nevertheless, Adam Bede attempts a serious exploration of the religious world; it is a more fully developed, if less satisfactory, "scene of clerical life". That it remains unsatisfactory is largely due to the uncertainties of the writer's treatment of religion.

Silas Marner has none of the uncertainties of Adam Bede.

Instead, it is a tale which through a clear simplicity of narrative line and form precisely embodies the writer's concerns. And although it is not in any sense a "scene of clerical life", George Eliot's concerns here are specifically religious. Silas Marner explores the human need for a sense of relatedness, and examines the way in which a religious community may work towards the creation of identity. It also shows the author offering perceptions about the nature of religious change - a new interest in her novels.

The tale opens with a striking evocation of the closed religious community of Lantern Yard. There is at once a sense that George Eliot grasps here the social reality of dissenting religion as she did not in Hayslope's Methodism:

His life, before he came to Raveloc, had been filled with the movement, the mental activity and the close fellowship, which, in that day as in this, marked the life of an artisan early incorporated in a narrow religious sect, where the poorest layman has the chance of distinguishing himself by gifts of speech, and has, at the very least, the weight of a silent voter in the government of his community. 126

What is perhaps most notable here is the author's openness: the sect remains "narrow", and to that extent is excluded from sympathy; but it is seen to provide a personal home, a sphere of significance, for the otherwise socially insignificant. There is no gibing about

"dissent" here - rather, an understanding of its power in creating identity. What George Eliot achieves in the opening chapter is a convincing sense of that "obscure religious life which has gone on in the alleys of our towns."¹²⁷ And for Silas Marner, the religious community is a decisive experience; George Eliot points not to Lantern Yard's inadequacies, but to its role in a personal development:

... these things had been the channel of divine influences to Marner - they were the fostering home of his religious emotions.¹²⁸

The writer's interest in "religious emotions" is clearly continued from Adam Bede, but Silas Marner is less insistent in its tone, and does not so obviously press the case for "feelings" as against "notions". Instead, Silas's religious emotions are seen in the fiction - Adam's were not - to be integral aspect of his identity. Once his religious faith is disrupted by the treachery of his friend William, the whole of his personality is similarly disrupted: George Eliot presents religious belief as inseparable from inner identity, from a person's relationship with the community, from a sense of rootedness in place. The tale concentrates on the creative power of love offered within the community, and on the destructive effect of its withdrawal; and central to the experience of Marner is his religion.

There is, however, no idealization in the presentation of the religious world. The narrow Baptist circle of Lantern Yard contains its crudities and destructiveness, and in Marner's other world of Raveloe the Established church does not have around it the nostalgic haze which clung in Adam Bede. Raveloe itself is presented unsentimentally - less idyllic than Hayslope, it is to be found "low among the bushy trees and rutted lanes"¹²⁹ - and Raveloe religion is seen with irony, not idealization:

The inhabitants of Raveloe were not severely regular in their churchgoing, and perhaps there was hardly a person in the parish who would not have held that to go to church every Sunday ... would have shown a greedy desire to stand well

with heaven and get an undue advantage over their neighbours. 130

Dolly Winthrop is indicative of rural Anglicanism's character, in her robust blend of superstition, good-heartedness, and theological confusion. It is a portrait that recognises both the inadequacies of rustic religion and its closeness to the fabric of community life.

The centre of Silas Marner is in its presentation of a salvation, a regeneration brought about by love, by the discovery of mutuality.¹³¹ "Cut off from faith and love", Silas exists in Raveloe in a closed and egocentric world, where his gold is a substitute for human relationships; its theft drives him to seek human aid, and he grows, through Eppie, to a rediscovery of love and identity. Such, at least, is a secular account of the narrative. George Eliot achieves here, however, a fusion of the secular and religious, as the narrative enacts both religious and secular understandings. When, for instance, Silas discovers Eppie, the reader is aware of an explanation - she has come in from the cold. But for Silas, the moment is one of religious awe:

"My money's gone, I don't know where - and this is come from I don't know where." 132

The fiction validates Silas's experience, and however much George Eliot may provide non-religious explanations or note her own reservations - "we see", she tells us "no white-winged angels now" - ¹³³his profound sense of a presiding goodness is felt as authentic. The writer here offers no reinterpretation of what for Silas is not just a rediscovery of love and identity, but also a rediscovery of faith.

Silas's recovery of faith is interestingly presented by George Eliot in terms of the need for a sense of personal continuity. The disrupted interior life of Silas's alienated self is eventually replaced by a perception of unity:

... as, with reawakening sensibilities, memory also

reawakened, he had begun to ponder over the elements of his old faith, and blend them with his new impressions, till he recovered a consciousness of unity between his past and present. 134

The fundamental religious impulses of Lantern Yard, that is, are reactivated and assimilated into Silas's later self: identity involves the continuity of feeling, if not of religious ideas. But there are forces which make for disunity and discontinuity, as the visit to Lantern Yard at the end of the tale makes clear. The past here has been destroyed - "The old place is all sweep' away." 135 - and the implications of this moment in the fiction are extensive; for religious faith has been seen as essentially connected with personal continuity, rootedness and locality. The forces of social change work to destroy shared experiences of community in a given place, and thus to disrupt a sense of personal continuity: where Lantern Yard was, there is now the factory, an impersonal place devoted not to human fellowship but to production. George Eliot is perceptively pointing to the secularizing, because disrupting, tendency of change. Both personal identity and religious faith are vulnerable to its effects.

Silas Marner, therefore, continues George Eliot's concern with the religious world, and is a development beyond Adam Bede. It is less uncertain, less distorting of religious actuality, and more effective in its presentation of experiences which carry a religious force for the characters. Feuerbach can still be seen as a profound influence behind the fiction; in this tale, there is an enactment of the regenerative power of human love just as clear as that in the Scenes: the difference being in the author's avoidance of any "rewriting" of religious experience to fit a secular scheme. Both Silas's loss of faith, and his rediscovery of it, are allowed to stand as authentic. But it is also possible to see continuities from George Eliot's pre-Feuerbach days, as Silas Marner presents a vision

of both salvation and damnation. Silas's discovery of Eppie is an analogue of Evangelical conversion - the sudden interruption of the ordinary day-to-day world by a gracious presence from beyond; and, equally, Dunstan Cass's drowning in the stone pits represents a judgement on his greed, an intervention of divine justice. Certainly, the discovery of Dunstan's skeleton, with Silas's gold, makes a moral point which has its roots far back in the Christian tradition. While this novel, that is, extends the author's study of the religious world, and shows her - in her perception of the forces which make for religious change - developing a sociological view, it also makes plain the extent to which her early religious outlook continued to be important for her fiction.

George Eliot's early tales and novels, I have tried to show, centre on the religious world and offer a study of it in which religious experience is taken seriously as a determining factor in personal life, even if the "religious" is frequently reinterpreted into the "secular". In the one earlier novel which I have not discussed here, The Mill on the Floss, religion is also of importance, but it is a religion which is almost entirely personalized. George Eliot presents Maggie's crisis of conversion as an inner experience which has no social dimension.¹³⁶ Nor is there in this novel any sense of actuality in the religious world; the Dodson religion of "revering whatever was customary and respectable"¹³⁷ is offered ironically as a dismissal of Establishment formalism, and Dr. Kenn's contrasting earnestness of belief is somehow stern and distant, irrelevant to Maggie's personal spirituality despite its idealistic commitment to "Christian brotherhood".¹³⁸ The novel, that is, centres on Maggie's isolated inner life rather than seeing the religious community as a context which can be creative of personal identity. And although religion continues to interest George Eliot in Middlemarch, it is predominantly this decontextualized version, in which the community

of faith is peripheral to personal life.

This is particularly the case in the treatment of Dorothea.

Middlemarch traces the development of Dorothea Brooke from the naive spiritual idealist, who supposes that self-abnegation in marriage to Casaubon will lead to fulfillment, to the mature woman who has learnt that personal fulfillment has more to do with love than with vague religious longings. It is a process in which Dorothea might be said to discover "the essence of Christianity". Yet George Eliot's treatment of Dorothea's faith is less convincing than the presentation of religion in the earlier fiction, precisely because of its lack of specificity. Dorothea's Puritan ancestry and the "religious feeling" which prompts her simplicity of dress are mentioned, but these are divorced from any particular context. Her conviction of

...the secondary importance of ecclesiastical forms and articles of belief compared with that spiritual religion, that submergence of self in communion with Divine perfection...

seems unrelated to any recognisable tradition in English religion.

What is unsatisfactory is the presentation of an intense "religious disposition" unrelated to a religious context.

Bulstrode is a far more convincing religious portrait, in comparison; the convincingness deriving from George Eliot's firm grasp of the Calvinistic world in which he is rooted. As in Scenes of Clerical Life, the writer is again drawing on her direct experience of Evangelicalism, and she is at pains to insist on the precise spiritual history behind Bulstrode's eventual rise to provincial, solid importance as "a banker, a Churchman, a public benefactor". Bulstrode is, in fact, a careful study in Evangelical psychology. George Eliot notes his "striking experience in conviction of sin and sense of pardon", a conversion which is an entrance to a small but rewarding sphere of personal significance as "an eminent though young member of a Calvinistic dissenting church at Highbury". And it is with deft economy that she pursues Bulstrode's career from there: it is a

natural move into the commercial world, and the idea of "instrumentality" provides encouragement for "the uniting of distinguished religious gifts with successful business"¹⁴⁴. The Evangelical conscience, with its conviction of divine leading, and its consequent vulnerability to self-deception, is here explored with a depth and sympathy George Eliot could not manage in the Scenes. Despite its melodramatic touches, the study of Bulstrode offers a telling account of the personal and social implications of what George Eliot saw as "the religion of personal fear."¹⁴⁵

But, taken as a whole, Middlemarch is not a novel in which the religious interest is uppermost; in this provincial life, only a limited part is played by religion. In Dorothea, Casaubon and the Bulstrodes George Eliot considers some varieties of religious experience and outlook, but for the world of Middlemarch religion remains a strand in the complex fabric of social life.

In her final novel, Daniel Deronda, the writer's concern with religion reasserts itself in a totally transformed way. Just as in the earlier fiction, religious needs are here seen in essence as the need for love and relatedness; but instead of presenting these needs as able to be fulfilled within an English context, George Eliot offers Judaism as an ideal which adequately answers the aspirations of religious feeling. Deronda's discovery of a Jewish identity is affirmed by his marriage to Mirah, and he thus enters fully into the tradition which George Eliot sees, apparently, as able to provide a radical sense of spiritual purpose. English religion is finally discarded in favour of the non-doctrinal piety, the internationalism of Judaism, seen as a living context for spiritual values and for human fellowship. If the world of Zionist aspiration evoked in Daniel Deronda is far from the English provinciality of Shopperton and Wilby - even of Middlemarch - the novel nonetheless indicates George Eliot's continuing concern with religion. It remains throughout an inescapable theme in her fiction.

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6. William Wilberforce, A Practical View of the Prevailing Religious System of Professed Christians, (London: 1797) p. 24.
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8. John Newton, Selected Letters, (London: Banner of Truth, 1960) p. 106.
9. G. Kitson-Clark, An Expanding Society: Britain 1830-1900, (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1967) p. 117.
10. John Newton, "Approach my Soul, the Mercy-Seat" quoted from Hymns Ancient and Modern (1861; London, 1916)
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21. " " " Vol I p. 73.
22. " " " Vol I p. 128 ff.
23. " " " Vol I p. 162.
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28. " " " Vol I p. 206.
29. " " " Vol I p. 228.
30. see " " " Vol I p. 206.
31. " " " Vol II p. 153.
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33. Ludwig Feuerbach, The Essence of Christianity, trans. Marian Evans (1854; New York: Harper, 1957) p. 12-13. (Hereafter, Feuerbach).
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36. Feuerbach, p. 47.
37. " p. 48.
38. " p. 66.
39. " p. 67.
40. " p. 82.
41. " p. 158 (my emphasis)
42. Amos Barton, ch. 1.
43. *ibid.*
44. Amos Barton, ch. 2.
45. " " ch. 1.
46. " " ch. 2.
47. " " ch. 2.
48. Feuerbach, p. 12.
49. Amos Barton, ch. 2.
50. " " ch. 2.
51. see Feuerbach, p. 82.
52. Feuerbach, p. 60.
53. Amos Barton, ch. 2.
54. " " ch. 8.
55. " " ch. 8.
56. Feuerbach, p. 48.

57. Amos Barton, ch. 9.
58. " " ch. 10.
59. " " conclusion.
60. " " "
61. " " ch. 1.
62. Mr. Gilfil's Love Story, ch. 1.
63. " " " " ch. 1.
64. " " " " ch. 1.
65. " " " " ch. 20.
66. George Eliot Letters, Vol I p. 347.
67. Mr. Gilfil's Love Story, ch. 19.
68. Feuerbach, p. 67.
69. see Feuerbach, p. 92.
70. Janet's Repentance, ch. 13.
71. " " ch. 7.
72. " " ch. 2.
73. " " ch. 2.
74. " " ch. 3.
75. " " ch. 10.
76. " " ch. 10.
77. " " ch. 10.
78. " " ch. 10.
79. see Janet's Repentance, ch. 18.
80. Janet's Repentance, ch. 18.
81. " " ch. 18.
82. " " ch. 18.
83. " " ch. 19.
84. Feuerbach, p. 48.
85. Janet's Repentance, ch. 21.
86. " " ch. 10.
87. " " ch. 5.

88. Janet's Repentance, ch. 25.
89. " " ch. 27.
90. " " ch. 28.
91. " " ch. 28.
92. Mr. Gilfil's Love Story, ch. 1.
93. Janet's Repentance, ch. 8.
94. George Eliot Letters Vol III pp 230-231.
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98. Adam Bede, ch. 2.
99. " " ch. 3.
100. " " ch. 3.
101. " " ch. 3.
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104. " " ch. 18.
105. " " ch. 18.
106. " " ch. 5.
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108. see Cunningham, p. 150.
109. Adam Bede, ch. 2.
110. Bedouerbach, p. 57.
111. Adam Bede, ch. 2.
112. " " ch. 8.
113. " " ch. 15.
114. " " ch. 30.
115. " " ch. 3.
116. " " ch. 8.
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119. Adam Bede, ch. 48.
120. " " ch. 17.
121. " " ch. 45.
122. " " ch. 47.
123. Feuerbach, p. 48.
124. Adam Bede, ch. 4.
125. " " ch. 17.
126. Silas Marner, ch. 1.
127. " " ch. 1.
128. " " ch. 2.
129. " " ch. 3.
130. " " ch. 10.
131. " " ch. 2.
132. " " ch. 13.
133. " " ch. 14.
134. " " ch. 16.
135. " " ch. 21.
136. The Mill on the Floss, Bk. 4, ch. 3.
137. " " " " " Bk. 4, ch. 1.
138. " " " " " Bk. 7, ch. 2.
139. Middlemarch, ch. 1.
140. " ch. 3.
141. " ch. 61.
142. " ch. 61
143. *ibid.*
144. *ibid.*
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CHAPTER IV

The Treatment of Religion in Mrs. Oliphant's "Chronicles of
Carlingford".

George Eliot's treatment of religion is, as I have tried to show, a wholly serious matter. It was a quite conscious and deliberate choice which led to the Scenes of Clerical Life; a choice to confront and explore religion directly, but "solely", as G.H. Lewes explained to John Blackwood, "in its human and not at all in its theological aspect." Not that theology, in the event, was left out; the Scenes are careful fictional explorations of the writer's understanding of religion, and clearly could not have been written except for her own deep involvement in religious questions. Adam Bede, again, shows a deliberate impulse towards a religious world and the novel's unsatisfactoriness derives largely from George Eliot's inability to handle religious issues convincingly; while in Silas Marner there is a more complete and assured control of religious material, and a clear imaginative perception of the rootedness of religious experience in a sense of place and of community.

Mrs. Oliphant, in complete contrast, came on Carlingford entirely by accident, it appears;² and her treatment of religion arises not so much from her need to deal with it, in personal terms, as from a realization that the religious world provided ample material for fiction. And to phrase the point in these terms is to be reminded of the fact that "material" was a precious commodity for a writer to whom the "literary marketplace" remained the sole source of finance.³ Money is never far away in Mrs. Oliphant's Carlingford series. But if the series began without premeditation, it none the less offers, taken as a whole, a portrait of a provincial community in which religious belief is a central - and changing - feature of life.

There is little exact documentation on Mrs. Oliphant's religious background, apart from a few references - and these mainly impressionistic - in the Autobiography. It is clear that her family were committed members of the Scottish Free Church, and the extent of their involvement may be gauged by her father's role as

treasurer of a "poor relief" fund in the Liverpool Scotch Church.⁴

Such social involvement by the Church indicates a concern by no means universal, and the warmth of the church community's efforts was sufficient to attract Mrs. Oliphant's brother into committed membership -

He got interested about the poor, and began to come with us to church ... Willie ... took the charge of administering this charity, and used to go about the poor streets with a cart of coal behind him and his pockets stuffed with orders for bread and provisions of all kinds ...⁵

Elsewhere, Mrs. Oliphant refers to the "warm Free Churchism"⁶ of her family, and that this was combined with a liberal outlook is clear from the fact that Willie was sent to study at London University and the English Presbyterian College in preparation for the ministry. Mrs. Oliphant records her family's awareness - and their wry acceptance - of the unorthodoxy of the English Presbyterians; her brother was entering a church which showed a sad "downfall into Unitarianism and indifference", but the family were cheered by its "very respectable tradition."⁷ Clearly, exclusive religious sternness was not in the Wilson family line. Yet the worship of the Scottish Free Church was, as Mrs. Oliphant described it in her Life of Edward Irving, "reserved and austere";⁸ and its doctrinal position, based as it was on the Calvinistic Westminster Confession, was one of firm orthodoxy.⁹ Mrs. Oliphant's own religious background, therefore, is one of Scottish Calvinistic orthodoxy, though her family's experience of religion seems to have overlaid this with a liberal and tolerant attitude. She valued tradition and ceremony, and the kind of community life within a church which could issue in outgoing social concern.

This view of her - of a woman of traditional but tolerant faith, straightforward and untroubled - certainly accords with that which

she presents in the rest of the Autobiography, in her Letters, and in many of the articles she wrote for Blackwood's Magazine.

Her contented orthodoxy comes through, for instance, in the ironically dismissive phrase she uses about her husband's business partner, Sebastian Evans, whose "... 'doubts', then becoming a fashionable malady, would not let him go into the Church";¹⁰ and her personal piety - never obtrusive, but always genuine - similarly reflects an orthodox faith. Her remembered determination to "bring up the boys for the service of God" is one instance; and if her clear conviction that God had special care for her children strikes us as naive - the arrival of a man from the Graphic with an offer of £1300 for a story, prompted the reflection that "Our Father in heaven had settled it all the time for the children"¹¹ - her "trust in God"¹² has a distinct force at moments of crisis. Some of Mrs. Oliphant's comments in 1864 illustrate this. Writing after the death of her daughter, she refers to "the impossible life to which God has seen fit, He alone knows for what mysterious reason, to ordain me ...";¹⁴ and her "God have pity upon me"¹⁵ expresses well the faith - in - desperation that is characteristic of the Autobiography for the year. Her desolation, her inability to accept death as a final parting, led to what is perhaps Mrs. Oliphant's oddest belief, considering her background, her imprecise conviction of some kind of communion between living and dead, which found fictional form in the various Stories of the Seen and Unseen. If this can be regarded as a personal religious response to unbearable events, it has to be said that very little else in her writings strikes the reader as having behind it the pressure of profound religious thought or experience. Her faith, that is, was not essentially questioning and exploratory, but accepting, and she placed higher value on "religion in daily life" than on religious speculation.

Mrs. Oliphant's taste for a practical religion is well illustrated in her discussion of John Caird's sermons in Blackwood's Magazine for February, 1856. Under the title "Religion in Common Life", she commends Caird's "wise doctrine" that religion is "mainly and chiefly the glorifying God amid the duties and trials of the world" and that "ordinary occupations" should be brightened "with the full force and radiance of godliness".¹⁶ But this line of approach did not mean that Mrs. Oliphant's religion was simplistic or complacent. In the same article we see her as religious critic, noting that "piety", in its conventional and accepted sense, could lead to a false narrowness:

... it is sad to see often an incompleteness and contraction in that life of unmistakable piety which ought to be the broadest, the most genial and the most fully furnished of all the states of man ...¹⁷

Similarly, the article "The Missionary Explorer"¹⁸ provided her with the opportunity not only to eulogize David Livingstone, but also to express her reservations about foreign missions and some of their supporters; and she is even more firmly, scathingly, perhaps, the religious critic in "Religious Memoirs". Here, she rejects the obsession of contemporary religious writing with death, the tendency to "deathbed literature":

... men have other things to do in the world besides dying, and it is not the true office of religion to throw a fictitious importance over the latest step of nature.¹⁹

- and her contempt for "Religious literature, (which) distinguishes itself by a more daring deficiency of literary skill than any other branch of the craft can venture on"²⁰ is balanced with a positive assertion that "religion is the most living inspiration of all life."²¹ By her own standard of practical reality, much of what Mrs. Oliphant found in the contemporary religious scene was false, not least the utterance of preachers who "open their mouths like the bells in the church steeple, under the compulsion of an outward force,

and not the powerful constraint of having something to say".²²

It was, perhaps, her valuation of practical religion which led Mrs. Oliphant to place so much emphasis on the role of the preacher, and so much less on the role of the religious thinker. The "spiritual teacher", she wrote -

is there to bear solemn witness that the wrongs and the injustice, the heartbreaks and miseries of humanity, are but for a time - that despite all the contradictions of this life, a divine purpose runs through the web, and a divine presence watches to see its grand intentions all fulfilled.²³

Her conception of preaching is essentially inspirational and consolatory, that is, and eloquence is of value in that it can call up spiritual and unseen realities:

That is the true gospel preaching which keeps a perpetual remembrance of our Lord before the common audience, where are always hundreds of solitary hearts vaguely longing for the universal Friend ...²⁴

The career of Edward Irving illustrated for Mrs. Oliphant - at least in its early stages - what a successful ministry could be; and when she quotes Irving's "Orations" in her Life, we see clearly her own view of the ministerial responsibility - "the chief obstacle to the progress of divine truth is the want of its being sufficiently presented."²⁵ The Life reveals most forcefully the writer's appreciation of inner conviction, outwardly shown in sincere and moving utterance; Irving was for Mrs. Oliphant "a man who trusted God to extremity", a "martyr and saint",²⁶ and if she recorded sorrowfully what she saw as a process of inevitable self-destruction, it was with admiration and tolerance. Fundamentally as she disagreed with his enforced sectarianism, she revered his spiritual power and disingenuousness.

Another of her clerical biographies, the Memoir of the Life of John Tulloch, records Mrs. Oliphant's personal affection for the man

who was not only her close personal friend from 1861 until his death in 1886, but also, it seems clear, a powerful religious influence on her. The two certainly shared important convictions; and of these the most important are probably a liberal approach to religion and an emphasis on the central need for personal faith. Tulloch expressed his views on the tentativeness of religious ideas in a passage quoted and endorsed by Mrs. Oliphant in her Life; the clergy instead of being dogmatic, needed to

"learn how tentative, how temporary are all theological products, the results of the spiritual forces moving in their own time ... coloured by ... opinions and prejudice and half thoughts ... 27

But Tulloch's assertion of liberal principles did not weaken his loyalty to traditional views of the person of Christ, as Mrs. Oliphant explains, writing of his hostility to Renan's Vie de Jesus:

".... (his) sympathy with all freedom of thought, and tolerance of all honest opinion, never weakened his devout and earnest sense that in the character and life of our Lord lies all Christianity. 28

- and Tulloch's piety, with Mrs. Oliphant's, was one which emphasized practical faith:

"Christianity is nothing to me or any man if it is not a source of living strength, 'the light of life'". 29

Apart from these points, there are other areas in which we may see a link between Mrs. Oliphant's views and Tulloch's. Movements in Religious Thought in Britain during the Nineteenth Century, Tulloch dedicated to Mrs. Oliphant in generous terms, referring to her "large powers, spiritual insight purity of thought and subtle discrimination."³⁰ The work is not simply a survey but also a clear account of many of Tulloch's views, and is of interest to the reader of Mrs. Oliphant in that it indicates areas in which it may be fair to assume that Tulloch is, as it were, developing the liberal-orthodox

views he shared with her in ways which she could not herself have done but in which he would have earned her sympathy. One notes, for instance, Tulloch's statement of belief in "the continuous movement of the Divine Spirit enlarging, correcting and modifying human opinion";³¹ his view that religion has progressed "from lower and more imperfect to more elevated and perfect forms";³² and his general sympathy with the Broad Church movement which "became a new birth of religion in many of the stronger minds of the age."³³ Evangelicalism he rejected firmly, but with a characteristic openness to its positive effects in terms of personal faith; Evangelicals were "essentially narrow and false", destroying "the largeness and unity of human experience" and being responsible for the separation of "religion from art and philosophy";³⁴ at their worst, they "had sunk into such teaching as that of Dr. Cumming and the slanderous orthodoxy of 'The Record'".³⁵ High Church or Tractarian dogmatism he equally rejected, quoting with approval Hampden's remarks on the futility of dogmatic pronouncements:

Whilst theologians have thought they were establishing religious truths by elaborate argumentation, they have only been multiplying and rearranging theological language.³⁶

His hostility to dogmatism, however, does not prevent Tulloch from seeing spiritual virtues in Tractarians; Newman's "Lead, kindly light" he describes as having "touched so many hearts and brought the tears of spiritual tenderness to so many eyes"³⁷ - a revealingly sentimental remark which shows that Tulloch was not immune - any more than Mrs. Oliphant - from one of the characteristically disabling features of Victorian religious life; (Tulloch, it is worth adding, saw Tennyson's "Strong son of God ..." as a summation of Broad Church theology, and the final stanza of "In Memoriam" as an expression of its aspiration and faith;³⁸ while Mrs. Oliphant, concluding her article "The Verdict of Old Age", quoted "Crossing the Bar" and added, "may those who remain meet that Divine Pilot in all the supreme joy of

39 recognition." Liberal orthodoxy had no special protection against sentimentality.) It is perhaps surprising, in view of his highly developed liberalism, that one of the ideas to emerge from Tulloch's book is the all-importance of unity in the Church. And this has clear links with Mrs. Oliphant's work; Tulloch sees his period as "a time when the 'dissidence of dissent' and the canker of sectarianism have spread to the very heart of our national existence, with so many unhappy results,"⁴⁰ and Mrs. Oliphant's views on "unity" and "dissent" are not much different.

The benefits of a church establishment were firmly argued by Tulloch in his last years, and in reporting this in her Life Mrs. Oliphant makes her own sympathy clear. The established Presbyterian Church in Scotland had worked the parochial system so as to carry "the ministry of divine love to the homes of the poor";⁴¹ all that could be set against such success was the "contentions", the "ecclesiastical bitterness", the "sectarianism" of a non-established system.⁴² And writing of the Great Disruption of 1843, Mrs. Oliphant remarks dismissively that "the new departure had only added a powerful new party to the ranks of Dissent."⁴³ In the Life of Edward Irving, too, her views on unity and dissent are clear; reflecting on changes in the Scottish church since Irving's day she writes:

Matters are altered nowadays; the unity is broken; and there are now two (Scotch churches) both of which are incomplete, and neither of which has a full title to be called national. At the period of which we are now speaking, there was scarcely any dissent in the country⁴⁴

Here, the tone of regret is unmistakable; the ideal is unity, a national church - the actuality is dissent, a word whose negative force in this context is clear.

Mrs. Oliphant's own religious understanding, beginning in orthodox "Free Churchism" but developing far wider horizons under the liberal influence of Tulloch, was one, therefore, which embodied clear

convictions. So that when she came to observe Carlingford and its religious life, she was by no means an innocent in church affairs. She had previously remarked of John Caird, the Scots theologian, that since, as a Scot in England, he was "neither a Churchman nor a Dissenter (his) sympathies are pretty evenly divided between the two." ⁴⁵ We may doubt whether that was quite the case with her; but the real point, of course, is not so much whether Mrs. Oliphant had distinct "views" on Dissent, as what the novels themselves say about religious community and the place it holds within society. In Carlingford, these questions could be explored through the imagination.

Carlingford itself - the place, the community - is a well-realized fictional achievement. The obvious comparisons - Cranford, Milby, Barchester - fictional settings of the 1850's - indicate something of the strength of Carlingford; Cranford is never quite able to escape from the limiting view expressed in the novel's first sentence, and is a place whose treatment calls out from its narrator a too-comforting nostalgia, exemplified in the final chapter, "Peace to Cranford". Milby is a place which is - less comfortably - disrupted violently by the Evangelicalism of Mr. Tryan, but which is not further developed by George Eliot after "Janet's Repentance"; and Barchester - a thinly-disguised Salisbury rather than a complete fictional achievement - remains not so much a place, a community, as a setting. Carlingford, by contrast, from its first appearance in The Executor, has a precise detail of observation about it, and as the series developed, so did the place. Mrs. Oliphant presents a changing community in which time is clearly present; birth and death are seen as parts of the process of life in Carlingford, and as time moves, so do people. There is, in the series as a whole, a careful observation of middle-class provincial society and the ways in which people move within it; and central to social movement is the fact of religious belief and community. Mrs. Oliphant did not set out, as I have noted above, to observe with

the same kind of sociological earnestness as did George Eliot; indeed, she says in the Autobiography that this is something she has deliberately avoided:

... I have never, I am glad to say, been a "student of human nature" or any such odious thing, nor practised the art of observation My own opinion has always been that I was very unobservant ... 46

But we must see this remark as a typical piece of Mrs. Oliphant self-deprecation; her imaginative observation was better, and more serious, than she would have cared to admit. It was in fact so good that contemporary reviewers charged her with "cynicism"; the National Review noted of Salem Chapel in 1863 that "Mrs. Oliphant has learned to disbelieve in all singleness of motive and grandeur of life", and at the end of the Carlingford series in 1876 The Nonconformist, which had maintained throughout the view that the author was ignorant of and hostile to Dissent, wrote:

Mrs. Oliphant's cynicism would do much to destroy her creative power were it not that she can in a remarkable degree detach herself from earnest conviction altogether. She views religious opinions as mere material to be worked up ... 48

Now Mrs. Oliphant was far more alive to - and involved in - religious questions than these reviewers thought; and her particular strength is that she brings clarity of observation to bear on the religious community, seeing it as part of society, a context for belonging and fulfillment but also for frustration and personal dislocation.

The Executor, which inaugurated the series (though Mrs. Oliphant either forgot or disregarded it in her account in the Autobiography)⁴⁹ does not deal specifically with religion, but it establishes Carlingford as a place and suggests some of the themes which the later fictions develop. The characters in the story are linked by their social functions; the rector, the churchwarden, the doctor,

the attorney; and the precariousness of middle-class existence separated from social function is well illustrated in the Christian family, whose hope of a legacy - and established social security - is dashed in the first chapter. Money, notes Mrs. Christian, can "make all the difference between sordid want and comfortable existence";^{So} and the convenient ending of the story, in which Mrs. Christian achieves financial stability when her daughter marries the attorney, comes uneasily as a "solution": the marriage "made a vast difference in the household of Mrs. Christian",^{S1} we are told - but the idea of "sordid want" has been too strongly stated for it to be thus easily discarded. This theme is set, in the story, in an exactly imagined physical and social space. Carlingford is a growing town, and near Dr. Rider's house is "a region of half-built streets, where successive colonies were settling, where houses were damp and drainage incomplete".^{S2} The Christian family are in a more established, precariously "respectable" area; they live in

a cottage on the other side of Grove Street - a homely little box of two stories, with a morsel of garden in front, and some vegetables behind ...^{S3}

Carlingford "society" is genteel; and Mrs. Oliphant captures well the anxiety of gentility through the attorney's eyes as he

saw the genteel people of Carlingford about the streets that day in a surprisingly distinct manner - saw them eager to get a little occupation for themselves anyhow - saw them coming out for their walks, and their shopping, and their visits, persuading themselves by such means that they were busy people, virtuously employed, and making use of their life ...^{S4}

Mr. Brown's perceptions here are surprisingly discomfoting; as if the fatuousness of comfortable existence is suddenly - and alarmingly - present to his newly detached observation. But Brown becomes aware not only of genteel society's emptiness, but also of his own:

... it occurred to him all at once what a bare room this was that he spent his evenings in - what an inhuman, chilly,

penurious place In the new start his long-dormant imagination had taken, John Brown actually shivered in the moral coldness of his spacious, lonely apartment. SS

Now Mrs. Oliphant "solves" this question by marrying Brown and Bessie Christian; but again, the force of the perception is notable; and the need for a sense of identity based in human mutuality is powerfully evoked in the phrases "inhuman ... place", "moral coldness". The writer, that is, although she tidily winds up the story with marriage, has hit upon a social theme which is more striking than the story's end suggests. And at the same time she has begun to establish Carlingford not simply as a "setting", but as a felt place.

In The Rector, a fine short story, Carlingford develops a fuller reality, and Mrs. Oliphant pursues the theme of identity discovered through mutuality. Here, it is the social ambiance of Carlingford which most forces itself upon the reader's attention. And "society" is seen from different points of view. At the beginning of the story, Mrs. Oliphant adopts, ironically, a tone of complacent and superior narration. From such a standpoint, Carlingford can be seen to offer, to its self-contented middle class, "a very respectable amount of very good society"; there are "no alien activities to disturb the place, no manufacturers, and not much trade"; the "horrid new suburb" is out of the way for the gentility; and "naturally, there are no Dissenters that is to say, none above the rank of a greengrocer or milkman." ⁵⁶ The same ironic tone extends to a description of church life, where the former Rector, Mr. Bury, is "lost in the deepest abysses of Evangelicalism, and the Perpetual Curate is "on the very topmost pinnacle of Anglicanism." ⁵⁷ But society, and the church, are not only seen from an ironic distance. From the point of view of the Wodehouse family, Carlingford provides a satisfying sphere of life, and the church provides a specific area of usefulness for the Wodehouse sisters in

district visiting. The Wodehouse world - effectively portrayed as centered within "a large, warm, well-furnished garden", enclosed in "high brick walls" - ⁵⁸ is a world of contented fulfillment, and the phrase "good society" is not one which bears for them an ironic flavour.

But for the new Rector, who has "no idea how to get into conversation", ⁵⁹ this society is unsatisfactory, and the first chapter ends with a powerful contrast between the lush Wodehouse garden, which the Rector has left with relief, and his own, bare, shelf-lined study, where (unlike Mr. Brown) he feels no sensation of "moral coldness".

Proctor cannot establish an identity within the given Carlingford society - he has previously become too entrenched in the role of "fellow of All-Souls" - and, Mrs. Oliphant skillfully notes, his own inability to fill a Carlingford role is matched by Carlingford's inability to "place" him: "People asked in vain, what was he?" ⁶⁰ Nor is this simply a question which could really be answered by attaching an ecclesiastical label to the Rector; at a more profound level, it is a question which he asks himself, without finding any convincing answer, after his dismal failure to console a dying parishioner: "was he a Christian priest, or what was he?" ⁶¹ Proctor's isolation, his inability to communicate faith or comfort, is well rendered in this scene. And one notices the balance, the sympathy, with which Mrs. Oliphant treats his ineptness:

"But my poor good woman," said Mr. Proctor, "though it is very good and praiseworthy of you to be anxious about your soul, let us hope that there is no such - no such haste as you seem to suppose ..." ⁶²

Whilst the woman "had ceased to expect anything from him", ⁶³ Mrs. Oliphant uses this fictional moment, not to dismiss the Rector, but to present him as discovering his own human inadequacy. Again, the writer's balance is shown in the presentment of the scene of Proctor's next sermon:

He looked down upon a crowd of unsympathetic, uninterested faces, when he delivered that smooth little sermon that no one much cared about, and which disturbed nobody. ⁶⁴

While Mrs. Oliphant set the highest value on personal faith, and its direct, inspirational transmission, she is none the less able to portray with sympathy and insight the dilemma of the clergyman who simply cannot relate to others.

The final chapter of The Rector shows Mrs. Oliphant developing her understanding of religious vocation. Proctor, trying to rediscover a role and an identity by returning to All-Souls, discovers that his Carlingford experience has changed him; painful as it was, it has developed his own religious consciousness to the point where he finds "discontent" and is finally "self-expelled from the uneasy paradise" ⁶⁵ of college seclusion. Having been unable to cope with the social or spiritual role of clergyman in Carlingford, Proctor has tried to withdraw, only to discover that withdrawal is no longer possible: Mrs. Oliphant is portraying a process of individual religious change, the result of painful interaction and self-discovery. But the end of the story does not present Proctor as having "achieved" an identity; rather, he is working towards an identity through a self-commitment to marriage and to pastoral duty. The contrast between Proctor's growth and Carlingford society's enclosed complacency is striking.

In The Doctor's Family, the last of the short fictions in the series, there is no direct dealing with religion; but the story presents a further development of the sense of Carlingford as a place and, again, touches on serious themes later to be more fully explored. Dr. Rider, we are reminded, lives on the edge of town, in "a corner house (which overlooked) that chaotic district of half-formed streets and full-developed brick fields", ⁶⁶ and place here defines social position: his establishment is "of a kind utterly to shock the feelings of the refined community". ⁶⁷ Rider's sense of social distance from gentility

is further enforced in the description of his visit to the Blue Boar hotel in George Street:

From the corner window of the hotel you could see down into the bowery seclusion of Grange Lane, and Mr. Wodehouse's famous apple trees holding tempting clusters over the high wall. The prospect was very different from that which extended before Dr. Rider's window. 68

Dr. Rider toys with the idea of what his position might be if the established - and genteel - Dr. Marjoribanks were to die: "people cannot live for ever even in Carlingford." 69 And, with the time-change link made clear, Mrs. Oliphant has the opportunity later in the series - in Miss Marjoribanks - to build on the sense of place and position established here: Rider eventually moves into the Marjoribanks house. There is an exact location, too, for St. Roque's cottage, the home of Dr. Rider's brother and his family; Mrs. Oliphant deliberately creates a sense of its distance from the genteel part of Carlingford, as well as painstakingly noting its ecclesiastical architecture, its small size and the willow trees which "harmonized the new building with the old soil." 70 None of this is fictional decoration, but rather a sign of the importance, for Mrs. Oliphant, of the place within which people live their changing lives. And St. Roque's itself signifies change; built in gothic style, a response to Tractarian enthusiasm, it is the centre for a new kind of worship and of church activity - the "sisterhood of mercy". 71

The most significant moment in the story conveys a sense of time's inexorability. Fred Rider's death is managed with great restraint by Mrs. Oliphant; at first, Nettie is overcome with a sense of dislocation - "The past was suddenly cut off from the future by this dreadful 72 unthought-of event" - which soon becomes a distant compassion:

Nettie gazed with a pity too deep for words at the awful spectacle of that existence lost; That the lifeless thing in the room below could have been a man, and yet have come and gone so disastrously through the world, was terrible to think of 73

But compassion cannot last long:"In a few days all this solemn crisis was over, and life went on again in its ordinary tame current ..."⁷⁴ And Mrs. Oliphant enforces the point: "Had he been the prop of his house ..., life would have gone on again after that interruption, all the same, with a persistency which nothing can impair."⁷⁵ There is a relentless tone here which conveys powerfully the writer's grasp of time.

Against the inevitabilities of time, the various genteel posturings of "society" seem insignificant. And thus when Dr. Rider - again, interestingly, seen as a "lonely" man - marries Nettie and still fails to be accepted by the "refined community", it does not really matter. Dr. Rider has found love, and whether or not he and his wife are "exactly in society"⁷⁶ is immaterial. Each of the three introductory stories in the Carlingford series, in fact, ends with marriage, which can be seen not as a convenient fictional ending but as, rather more seriously, a token of the value Mrs. Oliphant placed on love as a basis for identity. And in the novels which follow, she turns her attention more towards church communities, where, at least in theory, the value of love could be expected to be acknowledged.

The first, most obvious thing to say about "Salem Chapel" is that it is an artistic failure as a complete novel; As Q.D. Leavis says, the novel "got wrecked on the rocks of a melodramatic plot".⁷⁷ But leaving aside the overwritten Mildmay episodes, Mrs. Oliphant offers her readers an exploration of the chapel world, and of the minister's role, which analyses well some of the conflicting forces within this community. The opening words of the novel establish the particularity of place; the Dissenting congregation has its distinct locality:

Towards the west end of Grove Street, in Carlingford, on the shabby side of the street, stood a red brick building, presenting a pinched gable terminated by a curious little belfry, not intended for any bell, and looking not unlike a handle to lift up the edifice by to the public observation.

This was Salem Chapel, the only Dissenting place of worship in Carlingford. It stood in a narrow strip of ground, just as the little houses which flanked it on either side stood in their gardens, except that the enclosure of the chapel was flowerless and sombre, and showed at the farther end a few sparsely-scattered tombstones - unmeaning slabs, such as the English mourner loves to inscribe his sorrows on. On either side of this tabernacle were the humble houses - little detached boxes, each two storeys high, each fronted by a little flower-plot - clean, respectable, meagre, little habitations, which contributed most largely to the ranks of the congregation in the chapel. The big houses opposite, which turned their backs and staircase windows to the street, took little notice of the humble Dissenting community ... 78

Place, here, is exactly rendered, and one can see Mrs. Oliphant being tempted by a kind of Dickensian flippancy - the "curious little belfry ... not unlike a handle ..." recalls the chapels of Hard Times - and then discarding whimsy for precision. And locality, as ever in Carlingford, defines a place in the social world. Now this is a major theme in Salem Chapel. Mrs. Hillyard states the need for social contact - "I have resources in myself but still human relations are necessary" - and the novel explores the quality of "human relations" provided in the chapel circle, limited as it is. And for Vincent, the new, young minister, the social limitations are unacceptable; "society in Carlingford," he remarks bitterly, "has no room for a poor Dissenting minister." But there is a cost attached to social aspiration - an impulse in him, Mrs. Oliphant notes, created by a mother with leanings towards gentility - and the cost, in this novel, is seen to be dislocation and isolation. Vincent is offered social acceptance and a clear sense of personal identity within the chapel world, and rejecting this is a process of separation from the role he has come to fill. His self-absorbed superiority is something which repels his "flock" - one notes his deliberate distancing of Tozer the deacon, who makes special efforts towards friendship, by a condescending use of "Tozer" to the deacon's "Sir" - and when at the end of the novel Mrs. Oliphant vaguely holds out the promise of marriage it is

unconvincing: Vincent has chosen isolation and it is hard to believe that romance will change him.

Vincent fails as a minister - he will not, rather than cannot relate to others - but he provides the author with an opportunity fictionally to explore the role. It was a role which deeply interested her, as the Life of Irving demonstrates. The relation, in particular, between a minister and his chapel managers in a Dissenting community was of concern - as indeed it had been to Newman previously:

Look at the Dissenters on all sides of you, and you will see at once that their Ministers, depending simply upon the people, become the creatures of the people. 81

Irving himself might well have been an illustration of Newman's point, as Mrs. Oliphant knew; and in Salem Chapel her anxieties are clear. Her irony is obvious when Vincent asks angrily, "Am I the servant of this congregation?"⁸² but how can a minister be both servant and leader? The two roles seem incompatible, the one making him offer "comfort", the other "enlightenment";⁸³ the one encouraging conformity, the other change. Vincent puts this powerfully at the end of the novel:

"I am either your servant, responsible to you, or God's servant, responsible to Him - which is it? I cannot tell; but no man can serve two masters, as you know." 84

- but his antithesis is weakened by the fact that Mrs. Oliphant has not succeeded in presenting Vincent as a man driven by an inner sense of the reality of God; what elsewhere - for instance, in the Benson - Bradshaw conflict in Ruth - could be seen as a real issue, is here nullified by fictional incompetence.

But the question of the role of minister in relation to his congregation is pursued with insight, despite this weakness. Mrs. Oliphant points out that the money relationship is significant here, as in many other social questions in Carlingford. When "pleasing the flock" is in question, Mrs. Tozer observes:

"To have people turn up their noses at you ain't pleasant-."

"And then getting their livin' off you all the time," cried Mrs. Pigeon, clinching the milder speech ... 85

And that this is a means of pressure - not to say control - comes out clearly in Tozer's remarks about what ".... then as chooses their own pastor, and pays their own pastor, and don't spare no pains to make him comfortable, has a right to expect." The expectation - Tozer is emphatic - is that the "minister has to please his flock", and this is not just a question of appropriate congregational visiting (though ministerial deficiencies here are distinctly "disappointing"). Far more, it is to do with the use of the pulpit, since public preaching is not only a means of establishing and confirming a corporate identity, but also a means of maintaining for the congregation a respected image in the wider community. When, after Vincent's first sermon, Tozer remarks that "such preaching was food for men", he clearly has in mind Salem's reputation in the locality, and community "success" here is achieved by filling the pews: ".... the chapel is twice as full as it was six months ago," remarks Mrs. Tufton, "and natural, too, with a nice young man." Certainly, the chapel managers find this gratifying:

"Three more pews applied for this week - fifteen sittings in all," said Mr. Tozer; "that's what I call satisfactory, that is."

- but Vincent sees the weakness of such criteria:

Salem itself dwindled into a miserable scene of trade before his disenchanted eyes - a preaching shop, where his success was to be measured by the seat letting ...

And "filling the pews" may not be the way to keep the perennial chapel stalwarts happy, for what appeals to "outsiders" may be less than fully satisfying to those determinedly "inside". Mrs. Pigeon, for instance, is convinced that

"... what we want is a man as preaches gospel sermons - real rousing-up discourses - and sits down pleasant to his tea, and makes hisself friendly ..."

Mrs. Oliphant may be criticised here for her rather superior - even contemptuous - dismissal of lower-middle class "vulgarity"; but this does not invalidate her perception of the dilemma of the preacher. Vincent's colleague Beecher is prepared to make the appropriate adjustments - accepting with less hauteur than Vincent the actuality of chapel life - and reaps the appropriate reward - Mrs. Pigeon's "wasn't that a sweet sermon? that's refreshing, that is!"⁹⁴ Mrs. Oliphant, it is worth emphasizing, takes this question seriously: if she takes the trouble to explore some of the contradictions of preaching in Salem Chapel, it is simply because of her respect for "true gospel preaching" which could offer consolation to "solitary hearts".⁹⁵ (It is interesting to note that Spurgeon, the most famous popular preacher of the day, won not only Tulloch's admiration but Mrs. Oliphant's as well: she refers to his "wonderful display of mental vigour and Christian sense.")⁹⁶

Mrs. Oliphant's treatment of the Dissenting community in Salem Chapel was controversial. George Eliot - rather self-righteously, one feels, in view of her dismissal of Dissent in her Salem in Janet's Repentance - wrote:

I am NOT the author of the Chronicles of Carlingford from what Mr. Lewas tells me they must represent the Dissenters in a very different spirit from anything that has appeared in my books.⁹⁷

And for the reviewer in The Nonconformist, the author had dealt with ".... the supposed defects of the system (and) the vulgar prejudices of its adherents" without "any attempt or desire to find a reality of religious conviction."⁹⁸ To a large extent this criticism is justified. Mrs. Oliphant rather crudely makes jokes at the expense of dissenters, referring to the Test Act without displaying any imaginative grasp of the psychology of a really disadvantaged group;⁹⁹ and her class prejudice against "vulgarity", which she supposes to be endemic in dissenting

circles, is obvious - Mrs. Pigeon has been noted already, and Beecher's pronunciation of "Omerton" is a stick to beat him with. Further, there is a vein of toryism running through the novel which may be detected at odd moments; for instance, the assumption which emerges that a "Christchurch man" possesses more "grace" than a nonconformist minister; ¹⁰⁰ that

A poor widow's son, educated at Homerton, and an English squire's son, public school and university bred, cannot begin on the same level. ¹⁰¹

- and that there is an inherent difference between an "educated face" and an uneducated one. ¹⁰² All this is understandable, perhaps, from a woman who made such strenuous efforts to force her sons through the Eton and Balliol route, but is surprising in a novelist who elsewhere displays imaginative penetration. There is a recurrent tone of condescension when Mrs. Oliphant writes of Salem social gatherings. Early in the novel, for instance, she takes full advantage of the opportunities presented by tea at Mrs. Tozer's:

... the brilliancy of the female portion of the company overpowered Mr. Vincent with dumb amaze (he) gazed around him. Could these be the veritable womankind of Salem Chapel? Mr. Vincent saw bare shoulders and flower-wreathed heads bending over the laden tea-table ... ¹⁰³

- and the reader is clearly expected to connive in the assumption that these people are "different from us". Nonconformist pretensions are dismissed, too; from a similar stance Mrs. Oliphant rejects the Homerton view that dissenting ministers are "the priests of the poor", and remarks that "The poor were mostly church-goers." ¹⁰⁴ The charge of anti-dissenting animus cannot, in short, be dismissed. But-despite the obtrusiveness of her personal views - Mrs. Oliphant's imagination creates in the Salem circle an authentic sense of warm community which is not undermined by her frequent bursts of superiority. The phrase "Salem folks", that is, is given fictional actuality in the scenes

where the chapel community meets, in particular, in the tea meeting scene¹⁰⁵ and in the scene where the chapel gathers to consider Vincent's removal from the pastorate.¹⁰⁶ But if the warmth of the community's common, shared life does authenticate itself, Mrs. Oliphant makes every effort to prevent it doing so; in the latter scene, for instance, where Tozer has emerged as a warm and genuine defender of Vincent, the author's reservations are expressed in the remark that Mrs. Vincent was not moved by the "vulgarity or oddness"¹⁰⁷ of the scene. Mrs. Oliphant, that is, is in two minds about Dissent: at one level she rejects it intellectually, as we have seen, and adopts a condescending stance in the novel to convey her rejection; while at another level she grasps imaginatively the authenticity of community life with Dissent: here is a context in which "brotherhood" is realized. It is an equivocal creation throughout. And the writer is to some extent troubled by this equivocalness; Tozer's remark that "there's nothing but brotherly love here"¹⁰⁸ has some authorial irony in it, yet however condescending she may be to old Mr. Tufton, Mrs. Oliphant cannot entirely empty his phrase "my beloved brethren" of meaning. Salem may have social and intellectual limitations, but for those within its fellowship it provides identity and belonging.

But even brotherhood may be seen as an aspect of chapel life which must have reservations made about it. Mrs. Oliphant succeeds in presenting the danger of communal self-satisfaction in Salem: from "beloved brethren" it is only a short way to being "comfortable"; the community is real, but complacent. And one reason, perhaps, for The Nonconformists' hostility to Salem Chapel is that by the end of the novel, the community seems not to be conscious of any reason for its existence. Salem is empty of any real idealism, and has simply become a self-perpetuating institution. It is at this point that the novel has particular interest as a work relevant to the whole secularization

process. For Mrs. Oliphant has created fictionally a community whose introversion is not apparent to itself; it has become severed from its confessional and religious roots, declining into a social rather than a spiritual entity, without any realization of its own secularity. The word "gospel" no longer means "good news" for those outside Salem; instead, "gospel" becomes a shorthand term for what the community likes to hear, what boosts its own sense of identity. Mrs. Oliphant is surely being quite deliberate when she places the text "Love one another" above the speaker's head in the final meeting scene; ¹⁰⁹ it is an ironic reminder not only of Salem's shortcomings, but of how as a community it has settled down into a condition of mutual self-regard: "Love" has lost its religious significance. Mrs. Oliphant is showing, in effect, what happens when social conservatism overtakes a chapel community. (A theme, of course, later developed by "Mark Rutherford.") Its continuity is safeguarded, simply through its basis in the family - Phoebe Tozer, for instance, experiences Salem as an essential part of her environment - but there is no possibility of change. And change is what Vincent (though unsatisfactorily) represents: that he pursues his ideas outside the chapel spells its death, for unless it accepts change in a changing society, it becomes defunct. Now, that such a portrait should be unacceptable to nonconformity is not surprising; but Mrs. Oliphant is offering powerful insights into the way religious communities function and here, particularly, when, losing ¹¹⁰ hold on the idea of the church as a "great spiritual society", they lose their *raison d'être*.

Salem Chapel has undeniable weaknesses, as I have tried to indicate, not least a prevailing uncertainty of tone. But although it is a bad novel, it offers - at times despite Mrs. Oliphant - some penetrating comments on the religious life of its time. Similarly, in The Perpetual Curate, a novel whose badness has much to do with

Mrs. Oliphant's need to extend her material far beyond its capacity into three volumes, the writer manages to explore some of the questions related to the parochial ministry in a state-church context. Salem Chapel had centred mainly on the social world of the chapel and on the relation of the minister to his community; Mrs. Oliphant recognises the entirely different organisational structure of the established church, and in her next novel examines the clergy themselves. If the chapel world is seen as resistant to change, what possibilities for movement are there in a context where the individual clergyman is freer to pursue his own sense of vocation?

The middle-class world of the church is identified at the beginning of the novel not as a spiritual society but as a social group. Mrs. Oliphant's irony presents a comedy of social manners:

..... in every community some centre of life is necessary. This point, round which everything circles, is, in Carlingford, found in the clergy. They are the administrators of the commonwealth, the only people who have defined and compulsory duties to give a sharp outline to life. (11)

And just as the clergyman's function is social, so is the function of the group of which he is the centre. "Society" in Carlingford attends church, but never defines itself by religious customs or labels: the only equivalent in church circles of the term "Salem folks" is, simply, "society". The churchgoing is incidental to, rather than the condition of, membership of the group. Mrs. Oliphant's ironic shorthand term "Carlingford" itself conveys a precise observation of the religious world of the place. Polite society - "Carlingford" - knows very little about the way of life in Warwick; is "naturally anxious" about Mr. Wentworth's reputation when rumours circulate about him; ¹¹² and regards Salem chapel as "a totally different class of society" ¹¹³ even though the curate has been known to drink tea with the minister. "Society" defines its boundaries very carefully, and its hangers-on are

very conscious of the status they derive from the attachment:

Mrs. Elsworthy, for instance, takes a purely secular pride in his post of clerk and is quick to realize that being clerk in the Parish church carries more status than the clerkship at St. Roque's.¹⁴ Religious conviction doesn't enter into the question at all. To this extent, the life of the established church in Carlingford, is presented as one which is centred in the clergy because they are the only members of "society" whose religious ideas and feelings are public. Whereas "chapel" means the chapel community, "church" means the church clergy. And if Salem is distinguished by its communal warmth, there is none of this fundamental robustness of shared community in "society".

For Mrs. Oliphant, the established church in Carlingford has no social identity, and there are conflicting views of its role. Aunt Leonora - most of whose judgements in the novel are ironically dismissed - speaks of the church as a "missionary institution", whose task is "bringing in the perishing and saving souls";¹⁵ but her Evangelicalism finds no sympathy from the author. Mr. Morgan takes a view of establishment which emphasizes social power and control within his given territory; ironically referred to as "the spiritual ruler of Carlingford",¹⁶ he is arrogantly aware of his right of territorial control - he talks of "my parish"¹⁷ - and is scathing in his reference to Wentworth as an "insubordinate man".¹⁸ It is interesting, too, that on Morgan's departure from Carlingford, Mrs. Oliphant makes Wentworth take over the territorial view even more forcefully; the implication is that an established church system inevitably encourages notions of control, rather than notions of fellowship. It is perhaps surprising that the fictional impact of the novel should be to this effect - we have seen above that Mrs. Oliphant in theory supported the idea of establishment - and that the ministry of the established church is not presented more positively. Certainly, there is no doubt about the

writer's dismissal of the system of preferment: that an ecclesiastical appointment should depend on the views of a trio of old ladies is clearly seen as absurd, even if the ladies in question take their task conscientiously. Aunt Leonora's remark about a promising curate - meant to daunt Wentworth and make him see the error of his opinions - seems harmless enough: "He is an excellent clergyman¹¹⁹ and I thoroughly agree with his views", but Mrs. Oliphant points out the implied threat that, in effect, disagreement with Leonora's views means poverty for Wentworth and the impossibility of marriage. Establishment turns out to be - almost as much as the voluntary system - a scheme of economic bondage. The integrity and independence of the clergyman are vulnerable to financial pressure. And the triviality of the preferment system is nicely noted by Mrs. Oliphant in Mrs. Morgan's discontent with the Rectory carpet: a significant factor in the Rector's decision to leave and recommend Wentworth for the living. The analysis offered by the writer makes it quite clear that the ideal of a "great spiritual society" is not realized here.

But Wentworth does to some extent, it appears, receive authorial endorsement. The fact that he is taking seriously the existence, in Carlingford, of poverty and ignorance which polite society ignores is seen as a commendation. Mrs. Oliphant has her reservations about the spiritual value of sermons to the wharfsiders, who "were not greatly up in matters of doctrine"¹²⁰, and notes of Wentworth and Lucy at the baptism of Tom Burrow's six children that "neither of them, perhaps, was of a very enlightened character of soul. They believed they were doing a great work ..."¹²¹; but these reservations do not invalidate the attempt to help those in need that all this is part of. The author may not approve of the details, but the impulse, loving and outer-directed, is right. Such impulses in Salem are observed within the community of "Salem folks". Perhaps the test of an effective church leader, for

Mrs. Oliphant, was his power as a preacher, and on this score Wentworth remains, at least in formal church contexts, unconvincing. Against his Aunt Leonora's clear assumption that "hearing" a clergyman tells all that needs to be known about him,¹²² Wentworth holds to an idea of the clergyman as "priest" rather than as preacher.¹²³ Mrs. Oliphant is clearly satisfied with neither description if it excludes the other. Wentworth's Easter sermon in St. Roque's, composed of "very choice little sentences", does not "go to the heart of the matter" in the writer's view: he should have "gone direct to that empty grave in which all the hopes of humanity had been entombed".¹²⁴ And preaching at Wharfside, he does; and Mrs. Oliphant notes that this is a valid sermon, one which proves its efficacy by arousing a corporate emotional response in its hearers: "some people ...cried", and "a great many" stay on for the baptism.¹²⁵ Now clearly this is not a sermon which Mr. Morgan or his curate Leeson could have preached; and Wentworth authenticates his divine calling in this inspirational fashion - his priesthood is proven - while the other clergy remain at a different level. The lesson of Irving was not lost on Mrs. Oliphant.

In her study of Gerald Wentworth, the writer goes further than in her other clerical portraits towards an examination of vocation as an inner process. Gerald is a serious - and sympathetic - study in conscience, and although his Roman views are rejected, Mrs. Oliphant is left respecting the process by which he arrives at them. She could not have known, when she wrote in May, 1863 "I mean my curate's brother to go over to Rome",¹²⁶ what a furore would be created the next year by Kingsley's attack on Newman in Macmillan's Magazine in January and Newman's reply in the Apologia;¹²⁷ and certainly her portrait of Gerald Wentworth has none of the bitterness of that public controversy. Gerald is presented as deeply certain of his own vocation - "I am a priest or I am nothing"¹²⁸ - and yet deeply uncertain of doctrine: he

needs the "perfect peace" which the Roman Church represents. Nor is argument possible with him; of the "great battle" of mind he has been experiencing Mrs. Oliphant writes, "He had come through it, it was plain; the warfare was accomplished ..." ¹²⁹ Now the writer sees here a psychological necessity: Gerald is responding to an inner need for security which takes him inevitably to his "moral deathbed", ¹³⁰ as she sees it. Mrs. Oliphant's rejection of authoritarian systems is clear here; and Gerald's retreat from the future, and from possibilities of change, is rejected. His remark "There is no authority ... If you can foresee what that may lead us to, I cannot." ¹³¹ is a revelation of moral cowardice and of lack of faith. For Mrs. Oliphant's liberal conviction is that within the process of theological and social change some divine purpose is at work. And yet it is a curious dilemma for the writer - the process by which Gerald's inner conviction leads him to the abandonment of the right of personal judgement is sympathetically evoked: respecting the inner light, she rejects its conclusions.

In The Perpetual Curate, then, Mrs. Oliphant takes seriously the inwardness of religious conviction and vocation. But this is in a highly individualistic situation; there is no sense of religious community, and the church establishment is seen as a quirky and undynamic structure. It is left to individual clergy to pursue - in the lack of communal purpose - an individual vocation which may lead, as in Gerald's case, to a willingness to dissolve all personal bonds for the sake of an institutional one. The novel presents a view of the established church as offering little towards personal fulfillment.

Miss Marjoribanks is the most accomplished and successful of the Carlingford series. The narrative shows signs of thinness, but Mrs. Oliphant sustains a tone of witty and ironic detachment throughout what Q.D. Leavis has referred to as the work of an "acute and unsentimental critical mind." ¹³² Centrally, the novel is a study, in Lucilla Marjoribanks, of complete - and engaging - egoism, masquerading

as a sense of "duty" or social responsibility. Lucilla's frequent references to her "mission" in society, her "duty" to her bereaved father, are all masks for egoism; but "society's" connivance in Lucilla's self-estimation reveals its own moral nullity: Lucilla is not alone in her egoism, but set in the midst of a "society" which is equally self-concerned. And this - Mrs. Oliphant makes clear - is the "society" which, in the established church, makes profession of the Christian religion. To make the point in these terms is perhaps to create an impression of moral heavy-handedness in Miss Marjoribanks; in fact, the novel never makes pronouncements of that kind at all, but does work powerfully through irony and implication.

"Society" here, as in the previous novel, is seen as having a sharp and self-protective eye to its static preservation. Mr. Bury, the Evangelical rector, is sufficiently unconcerned about society to invite the Dissenting minister to tea and thus threatens "chaos"; and society is distinctly disapproving of such gestures:

... the Rector's maiden sister ... asked people to tea - parties, which were like Methodists' class-meetings, and where Mr. Tufton was to be met with, and sometimes other Dissenters, to whom the Rector gave what he called the right hand of fellowship. But he never gave anything else to society, except weak tea and thin bread and butter... (33)

Mrs. Oliphant splendidly captures here a tone of breathless and well-bred social indignation; and throughout the novel Mr. Bury is seen as a social embarrassment to genteel Carlingford, and in particular a threat on several occasions to Lucilla's carefully-contrived and genteel evenings. Mr. Bury must be respected in his role as Rector, but his religious enthusiasm - too often for society's liking - outruns his sense of social distinction and decorum. Mrs. Oliphant amusingly sketches the Rector's Evangelicalism. His protective desire to shield Lucilla from "temptation", his conviction that "the heart of man is terribly deceitful", his recommendation of Miss Mortimer as
¹³⁴
 "a Christian friend to watch over and take care of you" are all

carefully-defined notes; and while the writer is amused by Mr. Bury's "large female circle", she is not dismissive about him, or indeed about his sister. Miss Bury is, again, perceived with amusement - she comes from her district visiting "anxious about her young friend's spiritual condition, and the effect upon her mind of a year's residence abroad"¹³⁵ and her fragile Evangelical earnestness is well drawn; but her integrity is recognised. Even if Mrs. Oliphant cannot sympathise with the Burys' tendency to look for "stray lambs" in any social gathering,¹³⁶ their religious position is not subjected to the kind of ridicule that Evangelicals sometimes attracted - as, for instance, in Trollope's Mr. Slope.

The observation of clerical manners in Carlingford is well done. The Archdeacon's arrival is greeted with delight by "society"; for one thing, it may be some indication that Carlingford is to be "made into a bishopric", and, then, "a nice clergyman is always nice".¹³⁷ Perhaps no sentence in the novel expresses so well Carlingford's valuation of the clergy and its understanding of religion. There is amusement to be had from the Archdeacon's dangerous broad-mindedness; Carlingford's discovery that "it was impossible to tell what it might lead to"¹³⁸ is a good observation of social timidity. And a dinner party at which the Archdeacon and the Rector meet is a source of social comedy:

When the Archdeacon made any remark the Rector would pause and look up from his plate to listen to it, with his fork suspended in the air the while - and then he would exchange glances with his sister, who was on the other side of the table.¹³⁹

But if at one level the novel presents some deft and amusing comedy, the treatment of Lucilla and her religion takes the reader into far more serious territory. And Lucilla's attitudes are not seen only in personal terms: she becomes representative in her essential irreligion of the hypocrisy of genteel society's attachment to the church:

"... Miss Marjoribanks was of the numerous class of religionists who keep up civilities with heaven, and pay all the proper attentions, and show their respect for the divine government in a manner befitting persons who know the value of their own approbation." 140

And her orthodoxy is carefully - if ignorantly - maintained since heterodoxy of any form is inconvenient in social terms: Lucilla recoils from the "possibility of her religious principles being impugned", and is keen to assert her own belief: 141

"Every creature has a soul. I am sure we say so in the Creed every day of our lives, and especially in that long creed where so many people perish everlastingly ..." 142

Lucilla's is an egocentric universe, - "Providence ... had always taken care of her ... Lucilla piously concluded" - and one within which religion has a strictly circumscribed place. There is a scathing harshness of condemnation in Mrs. Oliphant's comment on this: 143

"(Lucilla) was not in the least "viewy" in her own person, but had been brought up in the old-fashioned orthodox way of having a great respect for religion, and as little to do with it as possible, which was a state of mind largely prevalent in Carlingford." 144

Religious faith, simply, is unknown to Lucilla, and her attachment to churchgoing, her (limited) interest in district visiting and her sermon reading are all appropriate, in social terms, to her position in society. Religious customs have been drained of religious significance.

Beneath the ironic comedy, that is, we are offered a view of Carlingford which presents the middle class as attached in only the most superficial sense to religion. Interest in the church service scene centres on questions of social propriety, and "society's" values are essentially self-preserving and exclusive. "Society" is committed, not to acceptance or anything like "love", but to rejection: it maintains its own existence and integrity by a careful and ruthless 145

exclusion of those who "aren't quite ..." And, Mrs. Oliphant makes clear, all this has a money basis; after her father's death, Lucilla finds out how strong is society's impulse to get rid of her, to the continent, or anywhere, because she has become a social embarrassment.¹⁴⁶ It is only when her financial status becomes respectable with her marriage that Lucilla is really accepted into "society" again - previously it was happy to ditch her. In Miss Marjoribanks, Mrs. Oliphant reveals "society" as a conspiracy of egoistic individualisms - Lucilla is no better or worse than her neighbours - in which religious notions of love and community are paid lip-service and even accepted at an institutional level in the established church, but in reality are non-existent.

In Phoebe, Junior, Mrs. Oliphant is not just reworking old fictional material for commercial purposes. This "last Chronicle of Carlingford" provides the opportunity - fifteen years after the opening of the series - to explore the effect of passing time on Carlingford and analyse the kinds of religious and social change which have been taking place.

There has been change, it is clear. Though still "genteel and quiet",¹⁴⁷ Grange Lane no longer has aristocratic residents, and has come down to the extent that Tozer now lives where Lady Western (here "Weston") once did:

The house they were fortunate enough to secure in this desirable locality had been once in the occupation of Lady Weston, and there was accordingly an aroma of high life about it, although somebody less important had lived in it in the mean time ...¹⁴⁸

And this change reflects a decline in "society" - certainly no longer felt as a living context, which, as a social fact of middle-class life, it had been in the earlier novels:

Society at that time ... was in a poor way in Carlingford.

The Wentworths and Wodehouses were gone, and many other nice people; the houses in Grange Lane were getting deserted, or falling into inferior hands ... the ... people were mostly relics of a bygone state of things ... ¹⁴⁹

Carlingford as a whole has a faded air - it is committed to the past, in a genteel and nostalgic fashion, and unwilling to accept the changes taking place within it and outside. For the wider world is in a state of flux, well noted by Mrs. Oliphant in the scene at the Copperhead ball. ¹⁵⁰ Here meet a curious variety of people, most (but not all) rising socially. The railway magnate Copperhead - a "British Philistine" in the Bradshaw-Bounderby mould - has roots in working life; his son Clarence, named and destined to aspire, is Oxford educated; the minister Beecham has imprecise origins but his wife is lower-middle class provincial Dissent - a fact which Phoebe is being trained to forget; and the Dorsets, aristocratic relatives of Mrs. Copperhead, have all the marks of a declining family: Dorset may despise Copperhead and his brash philistinism, but Copperhead's class - and money - are in the ascendent. The ball - very much a London affair - reveals some of the movements in society that Carlingford would like to ignore.

Mrs. Oliphant also paints a picture of religious decline in Carlingford. In this novel, the world of Salem has ceased to be important as a communal context: it has lost the warmth and genuineness it had in Salem Chapel. More than ever, it represents self-contented fixity and cosiness, and is dedicated to comfortable decay. The chapel has deliberately rejected change; ¹⁵¹ the author reminds us how Vincent - theologically vague, but a clearly progressive force - was in effect ejected previously, and in Phoebe, Junior this is paralleled by Northcote's rejection. But there is never any question about Northcote's suitability, as there had been about Vincent's; no specially-called meetings and intense debates. It is simply obvious that Northcote will not do, as Tozer comments:

"I'm cured of clever men and them as is thought superior. They ain't to be calculated upon. If any more o'them young intellectuals turns up at Carlingford, I'll tell them right out, 'You ain't the man for my money.' " 152

Salem, in short, is determined to fossilize. The few characters left from the earlier novel - Mrs. Pigeon, Mrs. Brown, Tozer - survive with their old prejudices reinforced; and this isn't just a question of unsatisfactory sketching on the author's part - time has (time does do it) made them all intensely conservative and bigoted. The chapel no longer conveys community, cannot even open itself to the temporary minister;¹⁵³ "brotherhood" is dead. What little remains of religious language, even, has been drained of vitality, and though Northcote's anti-establishment address is a "rouser" for which "the connection ain't ungrateful",¹⁵⁴ it remains simply combative. Mrs. Oliphant is charting a process in which "dissent" - in the sense of strong, original and independent conviction - declines to a question of "stick to your own side";¹⁵⁵ where identity comes not from positive affirmation, but from defensive negation. The fact that Tozer, once the most enlightened of Salem people, has now developed a tired and embattled outlook is a signal of the extent of Salem's death wish; change is ruled out, and demise is the alternative.

The world of the established church in Carlingford is similarly in decline. The positive and outgoing concern represented by Wentworth in The Perpetual Curate has disappeared, to be replaced by the brusque and unenlightened outlook of the present Rector. "The Church in Carlingford" has never been presented by Mrs. Oliphant as a genuine community, but now, in Phoebe, Junior, even an idealistic clergyman is lacking. The Rector is a crude and insensitive partisan, typified by his rejection of Northcote:

"Don't be seen walking about with that fellow," he said; "it will injure you in people's minds. What have you to do with a Dissenter...?" 156

- and it is clear that ideas of love or fellowship have no place in his outlook. He has views:

The Rector was very great indeed on the reredos question, and the necessity of reviving the disused "church customs." ¹⁵⁷

- but they simply serve to indicate his absorption in ecclesiastical trivialities rather than in any genuinely human question. And Mr. May is, again, a clergyman for whom any spiritual understanding of his role seems irrelevant. An isolated man, as incapable of relating to his own family as he is of making friends, he is said to be a "good preacher", ¹⁵⁸ although he has no impact in Carlingford except as a non-payer of bills. Mrs. Oliphant's presentation of him is harsh; despite his apparent lack of any religious conviction, his articles in religious magazines are "much admired as 'thoughtful' papers, searching into many mental depths, and fathoming the religious soul with wonderful insight." ¹⁵⁹ The difference between facade - the "thoughtful papers" - and reality - a man without the slightest self-knowledge - is well pointed. May is a man without any conception of vocation - "I did not force you into the church ... you chose an academical career, and then there was nothing else for it", ¹⁶⁰ he remarks to his son - and without any relation to God. His portentous references to "Providence" are mostly a cloak for egoism - "Why should things not go well with him? He was not a bad man ..." ¹⁶¹ and the "moral extinction" ¹⁶² he imagines coming upon him is not simply a question of a lack of money. Such are the "spiritual rulers" of the church.

Organized religion in Carlingford, then, is bankrupt; it provides neither identity nor community, and exists simply on an institutional level. Significantly, it is outside the religious sphere that warmth and mutuality exist; Mrs. Oliphant reiterates the point that the chapel fails both Northcote and Phoebe, who find social acceptance - not in the church - but in the May family. It is almost as if the

unreality of supposed communities emphasizes the need for some simple human group. But there is some relief in an otherwise considerably pessimistic view of religion in the treatment of the Northcote - Reginald May friendship. The crucial moment here is the scene in the fifteenth-century chapel of the college:

They stood together for a moment under the vaulted roof, both young, in the glory of their days, both with vague noble meanings in them, which they knew so poorly how to carry out. They meant everything that was fine and great, these two young men, standing upon the threshold of their life, knowing little more than that they were fiercely opposed to each other, and meant to reform the world each in his own way both foolish, wrong and right, to the utmost bounds of human possibility. 163

Perhaps nowhere else in these novels does Mrs. Oliphant so clearly express a personal religious yearning; Northcote and May represent immense religious potential, and the writer recognises in them both the possibility for creative change, and the possibility of mutually destructive combativeness. Her own vision of a religious future seems to be hinted at here - one in which the best religious energies of different traditions are united in a context of the common sharing of the past. The chapel itself - emblem of continuity and change - has more than a literal function at this point in the narrative, and indeed is a test of religious genuineness; Northcote's soul responds to it, despite the dissenters' disapproval, but Copperhead - "we'll not trouble the chapel ... railway stations are more in my way" - reveals his own religious emptiness in his response. By the end of the novel, however, Mrs. Oliphant has lost interest - or hope - in a religious future; Reginald May has simply settled into a comfortable, pluralist existence - though he works hard at being a clergyman - while Northcote has given up opinions for domesticity. Religious stagnation has reasserted itself.

Phoebe, Junior explores not only religious, but money values, and the novel reveals more than any other in the series not just the

fundamental power of money, but also the extent to which religion is corrupted by it. Betsy's remark, "Money's at the bottom of everything" ¹⁶⁵ is a comment on the narrative and the theme of the novel. Both May and Copperhead are dominated by money, alike captivated by its "power and beauty", ¹⁶⁶ and it is natural for Copperhead to refer to "the chapel business". ¹⁶⁷ Money, which always, according to Clarence, "finds its own level" ¹⁶⁸ is something which in May's view "made up for most deficiencies". ¹⁶⁹ The portrait of the Crescent chapel most forcefully brings out the effect of money values on religion; Beecham has risen "like an actor" to the "eminence" of the London chapel:

... where a very large congregation sat in great comfort and listened to his sermons with a satisfaction no doubt increased by the fact that the cushions were as soft as their own easy chairs, and that carpets and hot-water pipes kept everything snug under foot.

It was the most comfortable chapel in the whole connection ... ¹⁷⁰

The social "comfortableness" of Salem Chapel is bad enough, for Mrs. Oliphant; here, the merely material comfort of worshipping wealth is worse. And wealth undermines principle - "... it is almost impossible not to be a little worldly-minded when you possess such a great share of the world's goods..." ¹⁷¹ The writer has no patience with such adjustments; at least Copperhead is frank about his attitude to religion, rather than attempting self-deception: he knows when "Christianity has gone too far"

"In these go-ahead days, sir, we've had enough of it". ¹⁷²

- and it is with honesty of a kind that he enjoys the social position of "leading member" while having no concern with christianity. Indeed, Beecham's "gospel" - the gospel lived in his career - shares with Copperhead's a devotion to "self-improvement". In this cause, even the closest of human relations must be severed -

Instead of visiting the Tozers at Carlingford, they had appointed meetings at the seaside ... ¹⁷³

- and this deliberate separation - "the elder Beechams had not been sorry to keep their parents and their children apart" - ¹⁷⁴ is a token of Beecham's devotion to "love" and "brotherhood". Even Tozer, a victim of his grand-daughter's patronising, is an adherent of the "rising" philosophy, and for him it is, in a residual Calvinistic sense, a sign of "grace".

"... doing your duty and trusting to the Lord is what I've always stood by; and its been rewarded ..." ¹⁷⁵

The gospel of self-improvement negates notions of mutuality; "aspiration" involves keeping people at a distance", as Phoebe realizes; ¹⁷⁶ and Mrs. Oliphant's fictional realization of the ethos of aspiration is an important element in her criticism of Dissent.

This is not to say that the treatment of Dissent in Phoebe, Junior, is without its uncertainties. Mrs. Oliphant's contempt for the nouveau-riche Copperhead has an element of caste negation in it - their descent from an "original navy" is supposed to be sufficient to "place" both Copperhead and his son - ¹⁷⁷ and the writer's at times rather crude Tory impulses are at odds with her imagination, particularly in the treatment of Tozer. Here, imagination recognises the warmth, even civilization, and good-heartedness of the man - his welcome of May and Northcote is an instance - while condescension sees him as "vulgar", patronises him for talking with his mouth full. ¹⁷⁸ Again, Tozer - alone in the novel - is seen at a moment of religious crisis and responds with charity and humility - "God help us all" ¹⁷⁹ - in a genuine recognition of mutuality; though Mrs. Oliphant immediately feels impelled to devalue him by showing him incapable to the last of forfeiting money values. Phoebe, similarly, is treated ambivalently; beginning as a non-conformist Lucilla, egoistic and ambitious, an illustration of the hypocrisy of affirmations of "duty", she gradually softens as the narrative develops, winning more and more of her author's sympathy. If at the beginning she is a calculating product of the ethos of

aspiration, by the end she has discovered (though Mrs. Oliphant handles the melodramatic plotting awkwardly) something about the need of other human beings.

This "last Chronicle of Carlingford" is a worried novel, from a religious point of view. Time and change have not meant regeneration for Carlingford; instead, the place has seen religious decline, a creeping corruption of ideals, in which religion has been progressively emptied of anything but secular meanings. "Shared belief" has evaporated to a common adherence to values of money and social aspiration; and religious institutions remain only as empty frameworks.

In her "Chronicles of Carlingford", therefore, Mrs. Oliphant presents - despite her obvious and severe limitations as a novelist - a perceptive account of a provincial community and its varied experiences of and responses to religion. She brought to Carlingford an intelligent imagination and one which understood the inward significance of religious experience; so that her presentation of the community's religion is fundamentally discerning, even if at times her anti-Dissenting opinions, her intellectual preference for a unified "great spiritual society", lead her towards dismissive judgements. She offers, distinctively among her contemporaries, a portrait of the religious community and particularly the social world of the chapel which sees that community as significant for the life and growth of its members; concerned with people's needs for love and for a sense of social identity, she sees the chapel as a context for "brotherhood" - no matter how corrupted the ideal becomes - and creates in Salem Chapel one of the very few fictional examples of an authentic Dissenting world. Most importantly for the present thesis, she is aware in her "Chronicles" of the passing of time and of the change and decline which this brings in religion. She grasps the conflict within the religious world between those who accept change and those who wish to use religion

as a refuge from it, presenting inflexibilities of outlook and structure in both church and dissent; and she is not confident that progressive impulses will win. On the contrary, she sees various kinds of retreat taking place - old Mr. Tufton's resigned acceptance of the limitations of his "flock", Gerald Wentworth's flight to the "final authority" of Rome - which leave the way open for attitudes of religious conservatism and self-preservation to dominate. In this climate, she sees committed idealism declining, the religious world becoming desacralized as the practical gospel of self-improvement takes over from the gospel of self-giving. Mrs. Oliphant was genuinely and effectively aware in her fiction of the main, secularizing current of her time.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 4.

1. George Eliot Letters, Vol II p. 269.
2. see Mrs. Harry Coghill (ed) Autobiography and Letters of Mrs. Margaret Oliphant, (1899; Leicester, Leicester Univ. Press, 1974) p. 70. (hereafter, Autobiography and Letters).
3. see V. and R.A. Colby, The Equivocal Virtue, (New York: Archon, 1966).
4. Autobiography and Letters, p. 14.
5. *ibid.*
6. Autobiography and Letters, p. 18.
7. " " " p. 25 of. Chadwick Vol I p. 391.
8. Mrs. Oliphant, Life of Edward Irving (London: 1862) p. 243.
9. see A.R. Vidler, The Church in an Age of Revolution, p. 169.
10. Autobiography and Letters, p. 43.
11. " " " p. 6.
12. " " " p. 128-9.
13. *ibid.*
14. Autobiography and Letters, p. 193.
15. " " " p. 92.
16. see Blackwood's Magazine, Vol 79 (1856) p. 245-6.
17. *ibid.*
18. Blackwood's Magazine, Vol 83 (1858).
19. " " Vol 83 (1858) p. 706.
20. " " Vol 83 (1858) p. 709.
21. " " Vol 83 (1858) p. 717.
22. " " Vol 84 (1858) p. 730.
23. " " Vol 84 (1858) p. 731.
24. " " Vol 84 (1858) p. 739.
25. Edward Irving, p. 165.
26. " " p. 404.
27. Mrs. Oliphant, A Memoir of the Life of John Tulloch, M.D., LL.D., (Edinburgh: 1889) p. 188.

28. Life of John Tulloch, p. 203.
29. " " " " p. 204.
30. John Tulloch, Movements in Religious Thought in Britain during the Nineteenth Century, (1885; Leicester, Leicester Univ. Press; 1971) p. i, (hereafter Tulloch)
31. Tulloch, p. 4.
32. " p. 212.
33. " p. 262.
34. " p. 13.
35. " p. 262.
36. " p. 69.
37. " p. 106.
38. " p. 264.
39. Blackwood's Magazine, Vol 160 (1896) p. 571.
40. Tulloch, p. 123.
41. Life of John Tulloch p. 346.
42. " " " " p. 403.
43. " " " " p. 206.
44. Life of Edward Irving, p. 72.
45. Blackwood's Magazine, Vol 84 (1858) p. 732.
46. Autobiography and Letters, p. 79.
47. National Review, April, 1863.
48. The Nonconformist, July 5th, 1876.
49. Autobiography and Letters, p. 84.
50. The Executor, ch. 2 (in Blackwood's Magazine, May, 1861 pp. 595-614)
51. The Executor, ch. 4.
52. " " ch. 2.
53. ibid.
54. The Executor, ch. 3.
55. " " ch. 2.
56. The Rector, ch. 1.
57. ibid.

58. *ibid.*
59. *ibid.*
60. The Rector, ch. 2.
61. " " ch. 3.
62. *ibid.*
63. "
64. "
65. The Rector, ch. 4.
66. The Doctor's Family, ch. 1.
67. *ibid.*
68. The Doctor's Family, ch. 3.
69. *ibid.*
70. The Doctor's Family, ch. 5.
71. " " " ch. 13.
72. " " " ch. 10.
73. " " " ch. 11.
74. " " " ch. 12.
75. *ibid.*
76. The Doctor's Family, ch. 18.
77. Q.D. Leavis, "Introduction" to Miss Marjoribanks (London: Zodiac Press, 1969) p. 10.
78. Salem Chapel, ch. 1.
79. " " ch. 2.
80. " " ch. 5.
81. John Henry Newman, Tract 1, quoted in Cockshut, A.O.J. (ed):
Religious Controversies of the Nineteenth
82. Salem Chapel, ch. 15. Century : Selected Documents.
83. " " ch. 5.
84. " " ch. 42.
85. " " ch. 1.
86. " " ch. 33.
87. *ibid.*

88. Salem Chapel, ch. 15.
89. " " ch. 1.
90. " " ch. 3.
91. " " ch. 4.
92. ibid.
93. Salem Chapel, ch. 21.
94. ibid.
95. Blackwood's Magazine, Vol 64 (1858) p. 739.
96. Memoir of the Life of John Tulloch, p. 133.
97. George Eliot's Letters Vol IV p. 25.
98. The Nonconformist, February, 25th, 1863.
99. Salem Chapel, ch. 8.
100. " " ch. 5.
101. ibid.
102. ibid.
103. Salem Chapel, ch. 1.
104. " " ch. 2.
105. " " ch. 10.
106. " " ch. 36.
107. ibid.
108. Salem Chapel, ch. 1.
109. " " ch. 42.
110. see Tulloch, p. 123.
111. The Perpetual Curate, ch. 1.
112. " " " ch. 30.
113. " " " ch. 28.
114. " " " ch. 48.
115. " " " ch. 5.
116. " " " ch. 1.
117. " " " ch. 10.
118. " " " ch. 12.

119. The Perpetual Curate, ch. 29.
120. " " " ch. 3.
121. " " " ch. 4.
122. " " " ch. 3.
123. " " " ch. 4.
124. ibid.
125. ibid.
126. Autobiography and Letters, p. 191.
127. For an account of the controversy, see Chadwick Vol II, pp 411-416.
128. The Perpetual Curate, ch. 16.
129. ibid.
130. The Perpetual Curate, ch. 40.
131. " " " ch. 16.
132. G.D. Leavis, "Introduction" to Miss Marjoribanks p. 2.
133. Miss Marjoribanks, ch. 3.
134. " " ch. 8.
135. " " ch. 7.
136. " " ch. 10.
137. " " ch. 15.
138. " " ch. 17.
139. " " ch. 18.
140. " " ch. 2.
141. " " ch. 8.
142. " " ch. 7.
143. " " ch. 14.
144. " " ch. 17.
145. " " ch. 48.
146. " " ch. 46.
147. Phoebe, Junior, ch. 9.
148. " " ch. 12.
149. " " ch. 29.

150. Phoebe, Junior, ch. 3.
151. " " ch. 45.
152. *ibid.*
153. Phoebe, Junior, ch. 30.
154. " " ch. 25.
155. " " ch. 45.
156. " " ch. 27.
157. " " ch. 29.
158. " " ch. 10.
159. " " ch. 26.
160. " " ch. 15.
161. " " ch. 34.
162. " " ch. 22.
163. " " ch. 27.
164. " " ch. 35.
165. " " ch. 39.
166. " " ch. 26.
167. " " ch. 44.
168. " " ch. 28.
169. " " ch. 30.
170. " " ch. 1.
171. " " ch. 3.
172. " " ch. 36.
173. " " ch. 5.
174. " " ch. 12.
175. " " ch. 43.
176. " " ch. 5.
177. " " ch. 2.
178. " " ch. 25.
179. " " ch. 43.

CHAPTER V

The Treatment of Religion in the Novels of William
Hale White.

Mrs. Oliphant's exploration of a provincial community in her *Chronicles of Carlingford* reveals a process of social change and religious decline. The writer's observation is shrewd and sociological, and it is reasonable to guess that what really alarmed the reviewers in Miall's Nonconformist was not Mrs. Oliphant's ignorance, or cynicism, or even hostility, but simply her perception - from outside the nonconformist world - of the secularizing process which was taking place. The novels of William Hale White concentrate essentially on this same theme. But White, writing from within the nonconformist tradition, and specifically its Puritan strain, is concerned not so much with an observation of religious decline as with an exploration of its inwardness. And his portrait of the religious world has a greater finality about it; the novels present an almost complete sense of religious despair, in that religion is seen as bankrupt, destructive of ideas of love and fellowship, and creating instead isolation and disintegration within the personality.

Hale White's novels, also, have behind them - as Mrs. Oliphant's have not - the pressure of personal experience, so much so that they have been read as autobiographical documents. But it is necessary to emphasize that "Mark Rutherford" is not Hale White; that we are reading fiction and not autobiography; and the care with which White has worked to establish this is considerable. The papers of the fictional Rutherford are "edited" by a fictional Reuben Shapcott, and the whole is firmly distanced from the writer himself. White's intention is clear enough in the earliest two novels - but is less certain in the later fiction where the "Mark Rutherford" name is still used: is the writer deliberately creating narratives refracted through the Rutherford consciousness, or does the name become simply a pseudonym? The peculiar sparseness of Hale White's writing compounds the problem of interpretation, and the ironies are complex.

What remains unmistakable is the writer's estimate of the religious world as a dying and destructive context, and it is fair to suggest that Hale White's elusiveness is significant as a narrative response to his own experience of personal disintegration within the religious tradition.

Probably no more completely authentic Puritan context could be imagined than the Bunyon Meeting at Bedford, where Hale White grew up as an Independent. When he was admitted as a member, notes C.M. Maclean, White was "number 1936 on the Roll on which John Bunyan was number 27." It is a clear, apparently robust, inheritance, but the picture Hale White leaves in the Early Life of Mark Rutherford reveals a decaying puritanism of outward observance rather than of inner reality. The seven hundred or so people who attended the Meeting House did so, says White, not out of conviction but from

... the simple loyalty which prevents a soldier or a sailor from mutinying, although the commanding officer may deserve no respect.

The chapel was characterized not by love and warmth or genuine sharing of community - both Benson's chapel in Ruth and Mrs. Oliphant's Salem are clear fictional contrasts - but by a repressive and negative formalism which Hale White recalled particularly in the treatment of children:

Do what I could it was impossible to keep awake. When I was quite little I was made to stand on the seat, a spectacle, with other children in the like case, to the whole congregation, and I often nearly fell down, overcome with drowsiness.

The same note is continued as White describes how the threat of hell was freely used,⁵ and his discussion of the celebration of the Lord's Supper emphasizes the separation of "converted" and "unconverted" - the "unconverted" being placed physically out of reach in the gallery of the chapel.⁶ As White recalls it, Puritanism is a religion of individual isolation, of social separation; a negation of love and

community. This is perhaps most strongly imaged in the ceremony of admission, where a candidate has to describe his "conversion": it is a moment of solitude when the Christian faith is reduced to a notion that "God had been anxious about me from all eternity."⁷

But the introspective individualism of a puritan upbringing is interestingly contrasted in the Early Life with experiences of human warmth and mutuality. There is, for instance, the comment White makes about his grandmother:

"The survival in my memory of her cakes, gingerbread and kisses, has done me more good, moral good - if you have a fancy for this word - than sermons or punishment." ⁸

- and this is echoed in his valuation of generosity in his uncle and father, and notably in his nurse, Jane:

"Never a coarse word, unbounded generosity, and an unreasoning spontaneity, which I do think one of the most blessed of virtues, suddenly making us glad when nothing is expected." ⁹

It is as if Hale White can recall personal relations of warmth and love only outside the context of the chapel; and within it, an emphasis on fear, negation, repression, isolation. The atmosphere of the chapel is uncreative, and liberation is to be discovered outside - in the company of free, spontaneous people, and in natural activity; Hale White's accounts in the Early Life of his delight in wandering in his uncle's garden and in swimming and fishing are symbolically and psychologically contrasted with the enclosed physical stuffiness of the chapel building:

"The windows of the meeting-house streamed inside with condensed breath, and the air we took into our lungs was poisonous." ¹¹

This "poisonous air" was the air of "moderate Calvinism", which Hale White describes as "a phrase not easy to understand."¹² In fact, it was a designation clearly understood in the Independent context;

"The founders of the Union", observes a Congregational historian, "generally spoke of themselves as 'moderate Calvinists'", and he goes on to note that the foundation "Declaration of the faith, church order and discipline of the Congregational, or Independent dissenters" of 1831 embodies "moderate Calvinist" views.¹³ To the observer, "moderation" is perhaps hard to detect in the "Declaration's" statement of the doctrines of election and reprobation; and for another Congregational historian, Hale White's contemporary R.W. Dale, the word "moderate" had less application to the "toning down" of Calvinist severity than to the attempt to modify, or dilute, the formidable intellectual structure of Calvinist theology:

They thought that while preserving the strong foundations of the Calvinist theology and its method, they could modify some of the Calvinistic doctrines, which in their rigid form had become incredible to them. But they were attempting an impossible task They had not learnt that theologians who begin with Calvin must end with Calvin. 14

Dale concludes that "'moderate Calvinism' was Calvinism in decay",¹⁵ and it has also been seen as "diluted Calvinism", intellectually incoherent and dishonest:

The churches ... had ... moved away from the old Calvinistic doctrines, perhaps even further away than the declaration showed, for much of the old phraseology still employed was interpreted in a far looser way. 16

If this estimate is justified, Hale White grew up in a tradition in which the difference between form and actuality was considerable; and in his dismissal of "moderate Calvinism" there is an element of scorn for a half-way position which is intellectually self-contradictory. A response to this may be seen in his insistence on veracity as the foundation of all religion -

There is no theological dogma so important as the duty of veracity No religion is possible unless veracity lies at its base. 17

Another factor in his appreciation of veracity is doubtless the

experience of expulsion from the Independent New College. The affair was controversial, as the correspondence in the Nonconformist and the account in the Early Life indicate;¹⁸ and the main issue for Hale White's father was (in the title of the pamphlet he wrote on the question) "To think or not to think?" Hale White, too, concentrates on the college's lack of intellectual honesty; the college Principal's pronouncement "this is not an open question within these walls"¹⁹ is baldly quoted, and is a revealing sign of the moral and intellectual weakness Hale White found so appalling. The expulsion, in fact, is an enactment of all the shortcomings of "moderate Calvinism"; and in particular of the social and intellectual intolerance of the system: the doctrine of election had an impact in terms of separation and exclusiveness which Hale White experienced at first hand.

But Hale White's exclusion from Calvinism did not mean a complete break, and what is important about the episode is not so much his abandonment of the doctrine of inspiration and the "scheme of salvation", as the extent to which there are profound continuities, through the event. Hale White could not get rid of Calvinism as easily as it had rejected him; and the "poisonous air" of the chapel continued to have a profound effect on his inner life.

At an intellectual level, Hale White discarded the Puritan-Calvinist scheme; his essay on the seventeenth century divine, Peter Bulkley, includes a sharp, dismissive summary of Calvinism:

Its theory is that there is a God, who, for His own inscrutable reasons, determines to save some few people eternally and to doom others to eternal punishments. 20

But at the same time White can refer to Bulkley's "genuine religion", his "attempt to make the universe and its ways by some means intelligible";²¹ and can go on to assert that "unless we believe in principles and their supremacy we are lost."²² The meaning of the system appalls the writer, but the fact that it is a system wins his approval. A similar

ambivalence runs through the book on Bunyan, published in 1905; there is the dismissal of Calvinism -

The 'people of God' at Bedford believed in their Calvinism, but they ... went about their business untroubled by their creed. ²³

- but equally there is an appeal to its universality; Bunyan, argues Hale White, was

... drawn to Calvinism because of its relationship to that which is the same yesterday and today and for ever. ²⁴

It seems that for Hale White this eternal element within Calvinism was its dualistic notion of the struggle between good and evil: "Life is a conflict to the last" ²⁵ - and Puritanism, which teaches the "difference between right and wrong" teaches also the "doctrine of responsibility." ²⁶ A residual Calvinism, that is, needing a sense of system and reinforcing the either-or puritan morality, continued in Hale White throughout his life.

Another figure who reinforced this for him was Carlyle. It was Carlyle who, according to the "Early Life", had enabled Hale White's father to discover "that 'the simple gospel' which Calvinism preached was by no means simple, but remarkably abstruse." ²⁷ Carlyle, paradoxically, remained an influence on Hale White himself, not as a liberator from Calvinism, but as an affirmer of the Calvinistic morality. This is no-where more clearly seen than in the essay "A visit to Carlyle in 1868", where Hale White writes:

Carlyle is the champion of morals, ethics, law - call it what you like - of that which says we must not always do a thing because it is pleasant ... (Carlyle) affirms what has been the soul of all religions worth having, that it is by repression and self-negation that men and states live. ²⁸

What perhaps is most remarkable about this view - and it is echoed in the Letters ²⁹ - is that it seems to endorse the most conservative of Puritan-Calvinistic moralities: the intellectual framework of doctrine has gone, but how deeply Calvinism had penetrated is revealed by the

writer's approving and unironic use of "repression and self-negation"; it is difficult to think of any other writer contemporary with Hale White who could use these terms comfortably.

Both continuity and separation, therefore, can be seen in Hale White's eventual relation to the Puritan tradition, and this may be further illustrated from his use of the Bible. Though he firmly discarded "inspiration" as a doctrine - this had been the issue between New College and himself- he could not detach himself from the Bible as a record of profound and varied religious experience. Again, the relation is ambiguous, as a letter of 1901 indicates -

More than ever am I confounded by it, more than ever do
I cling to it, finding in it what I can find nowhere else ... 30

The move from doctrinal Calvinism is marked by an emphasis which shifts from St. Paul away to the stoic scepticism of Old Testament wisdom - mainly in Job and Ecclesiastes. It is as if Hale White cannot release himself from the tradition, but has to reshape it, reinterpret it, in order that it can still nourish his personal life. One of the reasons for the writer's high appreciation of Caleb Morris, the Independent preacher - "the last Christian I call him" - is that Morris had the power to bring the Bible into relation with his listeners; his eloquence, says White, "was the voice of the thing itself" - and it is the authenticity of the Bible, its human actuality, which White is concerned to maintain. And it is as the Bible speaks of the insolubility of the human condition, as it confronts "existential" questions, that White responds to it. 31 32

Two further influences on Hale White's complex and at times self-contradictory make-up need to be recognised - Wordsworth and Spinoza. According to the Early Life, Wordsworth brought about a kind of conversion in Hale White - a genuine, inner reorientation, unlike the orthodox "conversion" - which he had recounted to the elders of the 33

Bunyan Meeting. Wordsworth seems to have provided for White a notion of God and nature as accepting and loving; in total contrast to the Calvinistic threat of an inscrutable and damning God, to whom the proper response is fear. To Hale White, Wordsworth's poems "imply a living God, different from the artificial God of the Churches";³⁴ and "The revolution wrought by him goes far deeper, and is far more permanent than any which is the work of Biblical critics."³⁵ But some of the later essays suggest that Wordsworth provides - in his emphasis on unity - an escape from the dualistic notions which are more fundamental to the writer; Hale White's "Wordsworthian" experiences are recounted in such a way that the reader senses their temporariness. In the piece "The preacher and the sea", for instance, there is a rather too easy contrast between the preacher's hell-fire message and the natural counterpoint:

Sunny clouds lay in the blue above him, and at his feet
Summer waves were breaking peacefully on the shore, the sound
of their soft, musical plash filling up his pauses and
commenting on his texts ...³⁶

And in "Under Beachy Head : December" nature offers far too comfortable an escape:

On a morning like this there is no death, the sin of
the world is swallowed up ...³⁷

It is hard to accept completely Hale White's account of Wordsworth's importance for him; clearly the "revolution" White ascribes to his influence is not profound enough to exorcise the Calvin-Bunyan inheritance. And a similar point may be made with regard to Spinoza. If at one level the appeal of Spinoza is that of a philosopher who constructs a system which has total inner coherence, and which works towards notions of unity, oneness, it seems that Hale White responded also to the dualistic aspect of Spinoza, the idea that the "affects" can be controlled by "reason". His summary of this idea -

The only real freedom of the mind is obedience to the
reason, and the mind is enslaved when it is under the
dominion of the passions.³⁸

- echoes not only Spinoza but also St. Paul. But Spinoza did specifically offer comfort, escape from Calvinist anxiety:

"Let a man once believe ... that his mind is a part of the infinite intellect of God ... and he will feel a relationship with infinity which will emancipate him ..."³⁹

Explicitly, Hale White seeks from philosophy - in both Wordsworth and Spinoza - an escape, a comfort, rather than truth or illumination. The needs of the fragmented self are paramount:

"I have found his works productive beyond those of almost any man I know of that acquiescentia mentis which enables us to live."⁴⁰

It seems clear that the fragmented self derives from Hale White's experience of Puritanism and that anxiety and isolation are for him the products of religion. But - to return to a point noted in the Early Life - there had been experiences of affirmation, of warmth and mutuality. White was capable of conceiving of mankind as "a family of human beings",⁴¹ and though the Church was an uncreative context - "the church", he wrote, "has done more to dissolve belief than agnostics have done"⁴² - he could assert the creative power of relationship:⁴³

A man instantly becomes immoral by separation. When he considers himself alone, without any reference to the whole of which he is a part, he sins, and all excellency at once issues from identification with others.⁴³

It is difficult not to see a similarity between this view and the ideas of Fenerbach, and it may be significant that Hale White lodged at Chapman's at the same time as George Eliot was engaged on her Fenerbach translation; whether or not there is a direct debt, however, it is important that in his first published writing, "An argument for the extension of the franchise" (1866) Hale White argued that a sense of relationship was the foundation of true social life:

The first step towards moral regeneration is made when a man can be taught to think not merely of the self of today ...

to think also of himself as part of a grand society rather than as an individual Anything ... which draws us from ourselves, and which strengthens the bond which unites us to society, does good. 44

This is a valuation of mutuality which is far removed from the Calvinist emphasis on individual salvation and social separation. But White had experienced at first hand the Puritan training, and its legacy in his personal life was profound; so that when he came to fiction he was perhaps uniquely aware both of the religious need for love and relationship, for a secure sense of identity, and of the incapacity of the religious world as he knew it to nourish these. Portraying the final phase of a dying religious tradition, he explores the psychology of severance, what is involved in cutting oneself off from a religious past. That such severance may be not just deliverance but also self-mutilation is clear from Mark Rutherford's tortured reflections; but equally, that such severance is necessary is quite obvious. The religious world offers neither identity nor love, but - Hale White's is a bleak vision - nor are these to be easily discovered elsewhere.

It is to the question of identity that the narrative framework of The Autobiography of Mark Rutherford directs our attention. Rutherford himself is deliberately distanced from the reader by the commentary of Reuben Shapcott which begins and ends the volume; and Rutherford's own self-estimate is contrasted with Shapcott's estimate of him, as if Hale White is drawing the reader's attention to the difficulty of ever forming a complete view of character. Shapcott is only scantily drawn as a character; a "fellow student" with Rutherford, "unsuccessful as a minister", he is a journalist and part-time Unitarian preacher. Yet, despite the similarity of the two men's experience, Rutherford shows no great affection for Shapcott - the word "friend" appears on the title page not as Rutherford's but as Shapcott's designation - and Shapcott's treatment of Rutherford is by turns superior, critical and bland. The

impression of Rutherford's isolation - his need for love in the uncertainties of his own identity - is increased by his "friend's" treatment of him. It is also furthered by the poem - presumably "Rutherford's" - which prefaces the Autobiography; again a fiction-within-a-fiction, the poem dramatizes the lonely despair of a dying man, and the total lack of comfort which his friend, the first-person narrator of the poem, is able to provide. After his death the friend "closed in solitude his eyes", but before death he could provide no sense of relief from isolated despair -

I once did think there might be mine
One friendship perfect and divine;
Alas! that dream dissolved in tears
Before I'd counted twenty years. 46

Hale White here dramatizes with telling effect the disintegrating force of loneliness: the anxiety-ridden, crippled identity of Mark Rutherford is a product of unsatisfying relationships and of the indifference of others including the "religious". Among the indifferent, Shapcott must be counted; accusing Rutherford of "folly" in "cultivating thoughts and reading books to which he was not equal", urging that "our earliest duty is to cultivate the habit of not looking round the corner",⁴⁷ he is adopting a negative and self-righteous tone which fails utterly to recognise or sympathize with Rutherford's own mental and emotional nature. Rutherford himself convinces the reader of the personal necessity, the inevitability, of his struggles; and Shapcott's excuses for his friend - "I am afraid that ... he has misrepresented himself"⁴⁸ - strike a lame note. Hale White presents Rutherford as a man met with incomprehension by his "friends", unable to find a creative context for the discovery of identity.

Certainly the various religious communities presented in the Autobiography are not creative contexts. And Hale White is relentless in his portraits of religious people, too; the portraiture of both

communities and individuals being all the more effective as a result of the characteristic dryness, the lack of rhetoric, of Rutherford's style. If in one sense this can be seen as an aspect of Calvinist self-restraint - and the abrupt narrative turns clearly have a reference to the Calvinist sense of the inevitability of events, their inexplicability - in another sense it can be seen as part of the ironic purpose of the author. When, for instance, Rutherford remarks

I was thought to be as good as most of the young men who professed to have a mission to regenerate mankind ... 49

- the ironic force is partly derived from the amount left unsaid by Hale White himself: the compression of the Rutherford narrative makes the points without assistance.

Rutherford's earliest experience of religion is in his home, and the keynote is struck there. Sunday is "a season of unmixed gloom", and "rigid" is a term which applies to family routine as much as to doctrinal adherence.⁵⁰ The chapel continues the rigidity - in the "long prayer" and in the sermon there is a formal and predictable routine:

The minister invariably began with the fall of man; propounded the scheme of redemption, and ended by depicting in the morning the blessedness of the saints, and in the evening the doom of the lost. 51

There is no room in such a world for spontaneous generosity, or for direct impulse of any kind. And the careful polarisation - "saints" and "lost" - encourages an introverted and self-protective "clanship", as Rutherford calls it, the positive "satisfaction of belonging to a society marked off from the great world."⁵² Clanship implies separation, and Rutherford points out the threat of "suspension or expulsion" which hangs over each member who commits "one actual indiscretion".⁵³ It is no context for honesty, for genuine sharing; instead, it fosters pretence. Hale White's analysis here of the Puritan world and its psychology is economical and devastating; one notices, too, Rutherford's subjection to the Puritan fear of sexual impulse: and Hale White's irony works to expose the obsessiveness of Rutherford's outlook and

his vocabulary:

My religious education did confer upon me ... purity of life, and I look upon this as a simply incalculable gain. Impurity was not an excusable weakness in the society in which I lived; it was a sin for which dreadful punishment was reserved. The reason for my virtue may have been a wrong reason, but anyhow I was saved. 54

Sexual repression, for White, is central to a Calvinistic outlook, and Rutherford's fear of sex - which becomes a vindictive hankering after "the old prohibitions and penalties" - is seen as a factor in his self-distrust and his inability to relate to others. 55

All this, Hale White makes clear, is part of the "education" of the Calvinist Independent; the personality is formed by - and suffers from - its early experience of community. And in the Dissenting College, "preparation" is added to education. Here, it is apparent, earlier lessons are reinforced. Again, order and formality, system, are important:

We used a sort of Calvinistic manual which began by setting forth that mankind was absolutely in God's power. He was our maker, and we had no legal claim whatever to any consideration from him. The author then mechanically built up the Calvinistic creed, step by step, like a house of cards ... 56

- and Hale White notes ironically the fragility, as well as the structure, of the system. But Rutherford's need is for a personally-experienced and validated religion; his "reaching after a meaning" is heretical for an orthodoxy which demands "the acceptance of dogmas as communications from without, and not as born from within ..." 57

Orthodoxy, that is, is externality, form; has, in short, nothing to do with the life or experience of the believer. Preparation for the ministry is a process of self-fragmentation, in which intellectual belief is distanced from the inwardness of the feeling self. The bitterness of Hale White's analysis is again made clear ironically; when Rutherford remarks, after describing an interview with the

College President -

His words fell on me like the hand of a corpse, and I went away much depressed. 58

- Hale White points both the understatement of the resigned word "depressed" and the symbolic force of the dead hand. Calvinist "preparation" involves a sundering of the self and an attempt to destroy all personal impulse; and thus "prepared", an emotionally-crippled Rutherford take on the task of ministry.

Hale White has exposed, through Rutherford's narrative, the link between "loss of faith" and a fractured identity. Rutherford does not fall a prey to any of the more obvious nineteenth-century influences - Biblical criticism, "German" theology, science - but his belief gradually dissolves from within, never having been in any way integral to himself. It is also apparent that belief is irrelevant to the communities to which Rutherford ministers: they too, in fact, are dissolving from within, although the increasing distance between affirmed doctrine and actual commitment is not explored - as Rutherford explores it for himself - but concealed. Hale White's treatment of the Water Lane community brings out the emptiness of chapel life; it is a far more hostile - and depressing - picture than Mrs. Oliphant paints. Loyalty alone seems to keep the small number of worshippers together; the deacons remain "the skeleton".

But the flesh was so woefully emaciated, that on my first Sunday there were not above fifty persons in a building which would hold seven hundred. 59

Decline is clearly visible; and Rutherford observes a dissolving faith even in those whose loyalty binds them to the chapel; Mr. Catfield, for instance, "believed himself to be very orthodox He was as sincere as he could be, and yet no religious expression of his was ever so sincere as the most ordinary expression of the most trifling pleasure or pain." 60

There is a simple robustness about Catfield which Rutherford respects, but the odious Snale stands here for the sanctimonious hypocrisy which is also a possibility within a declining religious tradition. The sheer twistedness of Snale - his sly and repressed sexuality, his lower-middle class restrictedness, his "facing-both-ways" disingenuousness - splendidly evoked in the style of his anonymous letters to the newspaper - all this makes up a character so loathesome that Chadband appears almost a saint by comparison. But Hale White is not being vindictive against Calvinist Independency: Snale is a serious study in Puritan possibility - utterly credible given the tradition within which he emerges. And that tradition can also contain the Misses Arbour: Hale White's imagination is balanced in its presentation of Water Lane in that this range of people is shown to be contained within it: though it is notable that the Misses Arbour, whose house, significantly, is for Rutherford "one of the sweetest I ever entered", are felt by him to belong "altogether to an age preceding mine".⁶¹ They exemplify, as it were, a disappearing aspect of the Puritan tradition. And it is important that it is later Miss Arbour who shares her tragic experience of love with Rutherford, prompting his reflection

that unknown abysses, into which the sun never shines, lie covered with commonplace in men and women, and are revealed only by the rarest opportunity. ⁶²

Such spontaneous sharing is rare, and the chapel world protects itself from the "unknown abysses" by a determined self-restriction to the "commonplace".

The Autobiography, as I have suggested, is primarily a study in Calvinist consciousness, and Hale White notes effectively the developments forced upon Rutherford's conception of Christianity as a result of his isolation within the Water Lane world. Deprived of human fellowship, he sees the Christian religion increasingly in terms

of his own needs:

I said that Christianity was essentially the religion of the unknown and of the lonely; of those who are not a success. It was the religion of the man who goes through life thinking much, but who makes few friends ... 63

- and he identifies with Christ for obvious reasons:

I remember while this mood was on me, that I was much struck with the absolute loneliness of Jesus ... 64

Rutherford is conscious of giving himself, but also of finding no response from others - his searchings for mutuality are fruitless -

I had now been preaching for many months and had met with no response whatever ... It was amazing to me that I could pour out myself as I did ... and yet make so little impression. Not one man or woman seemed any different because of anything I had said or done ... 65

And it is with a full realization of the irony involved that Hale White makes Mardon, the one person who is interested in Rutherford - he comes, of course, from outside the chapel context - the cause of Rutherford's loss of a sense of the personality of Christ:

The dissolution of Jesus into mythologic vapour was nothing less than the death of a friend dearer to me than any other friend whom I know ... 66

It is when Rutherford comes to a full realization of his dissolved faith that he decides to resign his ministerial position. Hale White effectively matches Rutherford with Unitarianism, here presented as a declining denomination, a kind of anomalous relic of history:

Generally speaking, the attendance in these chapels is very meagre, but they are often endowed, and so they are kept open ... 67

Whatever the doctrinal content of the Unitarian chapel to which Rutherford moves, what Hale White wants to emphasize is the lack of a context of living warmth; and this is evoked with economical power in the description of Rutherford's first visit. Going straight to the chapel ("as I was asked to no house"), he "loiters about in the

graveyard till a woman came and opened a door at the back ..."⁶⁸

Rutherford's sparse narrative derives symbolic force from the reader's awareness of Hale White's presence behind it; here the "graveyard" is an effective preparation for the "cold" vestry - "there was no fire, nor were any preparations made for one" - and the water, which "had evidently been there for some time" is "not very tempting" to the

visitor.⁶⁹ The Biblical symbols deftly create a sense of distance

between the original force of the Christian gospel - "living water",

"pentecostal fire"⁷⁰ - and the reduced and lifeless nineteenth-century reality. The whole scene reinforces the impression of emptiness;

the building is "designed to hold about two hundred people" and

Rutherford, counting his hearers, discovers that there are "exactly seventeen"; congregational singing is "a weak whisper", and the Bible

contains "a funeral sermon, neatly written, (which) had evidently done

duty on several occasions ..."⁷¹ It is typical of Hale White's narrative

economy that "two very old labourers" sit near the door: there will be further use for the funeral sermon before long; The quality of

Unitarian fellowship is evoked in the "entertainment" which Rutherford

receives from his hosts, "pale, thin, ineffectual people";⁷² the cold

neck of mutton, with potatoes or cabbage, speaks not of poverty but of

joylessness, and again Hale White recalls by implication the rich,

Biblical imagery of feasting, symbol of fellowship and generosity.

It is not just Rutherford's first visit which is "sunless and joyless".⁷³ As he settles to the routine of ministry in the Unitarian

chapel, he discovers his work to be "of the most lifeless kind",⁷⁴ and

the social barrenness of the chapel is only relieved by the presence of Mrs. Lane, who has the exceptional quality of spontaneity.

Rutherford notes "I do not think she was a Unitarian born and bred";⁷⁵

and it is quite clear that she is no Calvinist - instead of self-

distrust she is characterized by creative, loving impulse of a kind

which Hale White admires but rarely here portrays. Why, exactly, she

is so different is not made clear; she is not an "educated" woman - knows nothing about Shakespeare - and her religious pedigree is undefined: her presence in the novel may owe more to Hale White's fictional needs than to fictional likelihood.

The estimate of religious communities is decisive: Hale White sees them as uncreative, decaying, and stultifying. There is no question of renewal being possible; "falling away" has established itself as the necessary pattern. And it is the pattern which Rutherford enacts in his own life. Only with various rather isolated people - Mardon and his daughter, the entomologist, Theresa - is he able to form relationships, and the reality of these emphasizes, by contrast, the essential nullity of Church contexts. Underlying the whole narrative is the question where, in an age of disappearing religion - Rutherford comments that "the race to which I belonged is fast passing away" - is there to be found some salvation? It is a question, of course, which is explicitly taken up in the "Deliverance"; and in the Autobiography there is no fully attempted answer. But Rutherford is aware that his habitual and disabling isolation can be eased by love. His self-deprecation - a Calvinist legacy - is moderated by the love of Theresa:

Blessed are they who heal us of self-despisings. Of all services which can be done to man, I know of none more precious. 77

- and there is a sense in which writing the Autobiography is seen by Rutherford as not simply a "confession" but a communication, a therapeutic act in which the sharing of suffering may work towards freedom from solitude. Rutherford speaks of love as a liberating and transforming power, but nowhere in the Autobiography does it become a fulfillment for Rutherford himself: what Theresa speaks of as the integrating force in human nature is not experienced by the character whom Hale White presents as the fragmented product of a decaying religion. 78 79

In the Deliverance, Hale White develops his study of Mark Rutherford, now freed from religious attachments to churches or the ministerial role, but not freed inwardly from his submission to the Calvinistic experience. The book is less coherent as a narrative, containing as it does more reflection, and enacts the wandering search of a man looking for identity and meaning. And the narrative framework creates profound ironies; in one sense the reader sees Rutherford achieving a kind of "deliverance" through his eventual discovery of love: but the abrupt close of Rutherford's manuscript and the bald account of his death by Reuben Shapcott enforce a revaluation of this "deliverance". It appears, finally, that only in that meagre portion of his life that may be labelled "personal" does Rutherford experience emancipation, and that the work-structures of society mean that "deliverance" is impossible while life lasts. The possibility that "deliverance" can only mean "death" is forcefully present, and Shapcott's choice of a title for the further autobiographical reflections of his friend can be seen as deeply pessimistic. The absence of the author, hidden behind Shapcott, creates the final ambiguity - hope and despair are both possible conclusions from a reading of Mark Rutherford's life.

In the Deliverance, Rutherford's tone is for much of the time one of remorseless disillusion. As in the Autobiography, he refers to writing itself as an attempted means to relationship; but here the conclusion he comes to is that human experience is not, in fact, mediated or shared by the word; he is attracted to an author's work, but further examination reveals the truth:

It was dead, but it had served as a wall to re-echo my own voice ...

- and he continues,

... I don't think that one solitary human being ever applauded or condemned one solitary word of which I was the author ... I wrote for an abstraction, and spoke to empty space.

The nullity of language is a telling symbol of isolation, and Hale White implicitly evokes the Calvinist notion of the Word of God as revelation: in Rutherford's world not only has religion proved empty, but the logos is dead. And there is, in society as Rutherford sees it, a basic disconnection between people, a rooted alienation. In many individuals this occurs as "almost total absence from themselves";⁸¹ in the Tory correspondent of the Gazette it is described in these terms -

The unreality of his character was a husk surrounding him, but it did not touch the core.⁸²

- and this separation within the self can become a question of the projection of totally false "selves" to the world: Rutherford refers to

the stage costume which members continued to wear in the streets and at the dinner-table, and in which some of them even slept and said their prayers.⁸³

Certainly Rutherford sees separation as a necessary consequence of life in the city. His comment here that "Hope, faith and God seemed impossible amidst the smoke of the streets"⁸⁴ echoes his first experience of London, recorded in the Autobiography. Then, he was "overcome with the most dreadful sense of loneliness", reinforced by

The thought of all the happy homes which lay around me, in which dwelt men who had found a position, an occupation, and, above all things, affection.⁸⁵

The crucial change is that now, in the Deliverance the ideas of "happy homes" and "affection" are seen to be illusory. There is a blankness and a desolation about city life deriving from the lack of affection or relationship: Rutherford notices on Sunday "vast wandering masses",⁸⁶ "swarms of people", and "small mobs"; unable to differentiate people, he sees in them the same purposelessness that he senses in himself. Most of all, this is conveyed in the Nassau Street scene of Sunday afternoon domestic "duty":

The husband pushes the perambulator out of the dingy passage,

and gazes doubtfully this way and that way, not knowing whither to go, and evidently longing for the Monday, when his work, however disagreeable it may be, will be his plain duty. His wife follows, carrying a child, and a boy and girl in unaccustomed apparel walk by her side ... There are no shops open; the sky over their heads is mud, the earth is mud under their feet, the muddy houses stretch in long rows, black, gaunt, uniform ... 87

The family ties people together, but it is a bondage rather than a creative union. And this is emphasized in the M'Kay marriage;

Mrs. M'Kay is

an honest, good little woman, but so much attached to him and so dependent on him that she was his mere echo. 88

Eventually, M'Kay begins to see his wife as a person, and relationship develops, but

He had just time enough to see what she really was, and then she died. 89

Just as the M'Kay marriage never achieves satisfactoriness, so the other marriages which Rutherford observes are blighted and unfulfilled, contexts for suffering - as in the Butts and Cardinal unions - rather than for creative joy.

A further aspect of Rutherford's disillusion can be seen in his treatment of religion in the City. He is well aware of his own inability to make any constructive use of the opportunity to preach to thousands -

I discovered that my sermon would be very nearly as follows: "Dear friends, I know no more than you know; we had better go home!" 90

- and he reflects that only a supernatural gospel - one, that is, no longer credible - would have power to "regenerate the race".

Regeneration is needed, but is no longer possible. Religious meetings simply prove this point. When a preacher addresses a free-thinking meeting which Rutherford and M'Kay attend, his "Amen" is loudly applauded -

They evidently considered the prayer merely as an elocutionary showpiece. 91

And Rutherford reflects equally dismissively on the secularists:

To waste a Sunday morning in ridiculing such stories as that of Jonah was surely as imbecile as to waste it in proving their verbal veracity. 92

Neither religion nor irreligion, that is, has anything to offer. Certainly, when M'Kay attempts his own religious society, preaching "Christ ... and His unifying influence", and "possessed by a vision of a new Christianity which was to take the place of the old and dead theologies", it is received with as much serious interest as the preacher's prayer: 93

Just before he finished, three or four out of the half-a-dozen outsiders who were present whistled with all their might and ran down the stairs shouting to one another. As we went out they had collected about the door, and amused themselves by pushing one another against us, and kicking an old kettle behind us and amongst us all the way up the street ... 94

Unlike Mrs. Humphrey Ward, who was in Robert Elsmere to present an optimistic view of the continuation of a regenerated religion in the "new brotherhood of Christ", Hale White seems fully pessimistic about the possibility of a "new Christianity". And in Rutherford's estimate, any religion is irrelevant to the real condition of society; the few "outsiders" at the Drury Lane meeting are indicative of volcanic rumblings:

Our civilization seemed nothing but a thin film or crust lying over a volcanic pit, and I often wondered whether some day the pit would not break up through it and destroy us all. 95

And there is a powerful sense of social threat here of an impending destruction which will engulf everyone, as if the once-Calvinist Rutherford cannot escape from eschatological ideas. Just a few may be saved -

M'Kay ... did not convert Drury Lane, but he saved two or three. 96

- but the vast majority are doomed to perdition. It is a Calvinist pessimism in Rutherford which prevents him from thinking in terms of the salvation of a whole social order. And the pessimism is not necessarily Hale White's; Shapcott's editorial note in Chapter 2 makes reservations which may partly be the author's. What is clear is that Mark Rutherford sees only very limited possibilities for personal change. There is "salvation" of a kind - at least, the chance to share and thus perhaps allay suffering - but it is a purely secular and temporary deliverance. Hale White makes the point that Rutherford himself benefits from the mutuality involved in the attempts to "save" the few individuals at Drury Lane; the warmth of Rutherford's concern is apparent in the narrative,⁹⁷ as if he is at last able to enter into the lives and sufferings of others and discover meaning in the sharing this involves. He appears more genuinely a "minister" in this context than in the churches where he was previously so designated. Indeed, Rutherford explicitly refers to his rediscovery of religion through the Drury Lane venture;⁹⁸ and it is interesting that the context for this in some ways mirrors - in a secular form - the earliest of his religious experiences: the small Drury Lane group is, as it were, a church gathered out of the world, with its own "theology", pursuing its own life and sharing its own ideals. What seems to be happening is that Rutherford is experiencing some kind of reconciliation between his earlier and his present self; the emphasis is now less on his fragmented personality, and Hale White is moving towards a portrait of integration rather than of severance.

It is with his rediscovery of his earliest love that Rutherford begins to find something like fulfillment, and Hale White's intention - again to link the past and present - is clear. For Rutherford, the "resurrection" of a former love is "beyond ... comprehension",⁹⁹ but Hale White presents it as the necessary outcome of a deep need for a re-integration of personality: returning to his home town - "the place in which I was born" - Rutherford looks from the hotel window over the

moonlit river:

The landscape seemed haunted by ghosts of my former self;
At one particular point, so well known, I stood fishing.
At another, ... I was examining the ice ... 100

- and though his urge is at once to dismiss the emotional response of
"sentimental melancholy" -

It is no pleasure to me to revisit scenes in which
earlier days have been passed...

- the movement towards unity is too strong to be resisted when he
meets Ellen:

What is there which is more potent than the recollection
of past love to move us to love, and knit love with closest
bonds? ... As I looked at her, I remembered I could
hold out no longer. 101

It is an extraordinary narrative turn on Hale White's part, but the
moment carries conviction in psychological terms:

My arm was around her in an instant, her head was on my
shoulder, and my many wanderings were over. 102

It is for Rutherford the reconciliation of past and present, the
healing of a fractured self. But this is not complete deliverance;
if Rutherford is discovering love and wholeness, it is still a wholeness
in which the rest of society is uninterested. He now begins to see
love as a transcendent reality -

The love of woman is ... a living witness never failing
of an actuality in God which otherwise we would never know ... 103

- but this revolution in his personal thinking has no effect on the
outer world, which remains as comfortless as ever.

Marriage is not presented as a "solution", although it can provide
meaning within a personal life; for the economic realities of wage
slavery - relentlessly portrayed by Hale White in Chapter 8 and in
Shapcott's brief postscript - mean that "work" becomes a self-destructive
process. And - ironically - it is his new-found love and consequent

marriage which create the need for Rutherford to "add to his income": love may be deliverance, but marriage is an economic commitment as well as a personal relation, and it leads directly to the "dungeon" where Rutherford works as a clerk.¹⁰⁴ Further, it is at this point, after having once again experienced wholeness of personality, that Rutherford has to make a deliberate choice to divide himself again:

I cut off my office life... from my life at home so completely that I was two selves ...¹⁰⁵

For Hale White it is this inconsequentiality which is characteristic of a non-religious universe: each powerful experience carries its own message - of hope or of despair - and this is most forcefully conveyed in the chapter entitled "Holidays", where the perfect peace of a sunny day suddenly transforms itself into the destructive violence of the storm. The narrative at this point enacts one of Rutherford's own "theological" conclusions, that "No theory of the world is possible."¹⁰⁶ As the "Notes on the Book of Job" put it,

God is great, we know not his ways. He takes from us all we have, but yet, if we possess our souls in patience, we may pass the valley of the shadow and come out in sunlight again. We may or we may not.¹⁰⁷

Rutherford experiences the contradictions he here articulates; Hale White offers - it is a remarkable feat of authorial control - no explanation or conclusion. No "conclusions" are possible in a non-religious world: this is part of the price paid for "deliverance".

In The Revolution in Tanner's Lane the identity of Mark Rutherford is no longer presented to the reader as itself a study in Puritan consciousness. Hale White's theme - the decline of Dissent - remains the same, but he now dramatizes it through a historical study in contrasts: radical Dissent of the 1814-1817 period in London and Manchester is set against the conforming and enervated Dissent of the mid-1840's in the small-town context of Cowfold. The structure of the novel, with its abrupt division into two historically-divided sections,

enforces the presentation of the theme: Cowfold's Dissent reveals itself as decayed and unprincipled by any standards, but the remembered vigour of the previous generation assists the condemnation. Not, however, that 1814 is in any sense seen by Hale White as a golden age of faith; the evocation of the age of the Cromwellian Independents¹⁰⁸ places a period of secure and confident conviction far further back in time, and the study of Zachariah Coleman is one of a man already far removed in descent from his Puritan forefathers. In fact, Coleman himself is (like Rutherford) a study in dissolving faith; although whereas Rutherford's faith disappears apparently from within, Coleman's is challenged by new encounters and experiences with others, and declines as a result.

From the beginning Coleman is presented as moulded in his personality and social life by the Independent tradition he inhabits. He is "a Dissenter in religion, and a fierce Radical in politics",¹⁰⁹ and White's explanatory note - "as many of the Dissenters in that day were" - not only marks the passing of political radicalism within Dissent, but also establishes it as an aspect of (then) Dissenting community. Hale White is also careful to place Coleman in an intellectual tradition:

It may be questioned ... whether any religious body has ever stood so distinctly upon the understanding, and has used its intellect with such rigorous activity, as the Puritans, from whom Zachariah was a genuine descendent.¹¹⁰

- but also notes the distance travelled in this descent; as a "moderate Calvinist", Coleman

... held to Calvinism as his undoubted creed, but when it came to the push in actual practice he modified it.¹¹¹

It is, in fact, clear that Coleman is a product of his Dissenting community, inheriting its traditions and limitations. And the limitations are severe, as Coleman's emotional life tells. Hale White deftly notes the extent to which Coleman and his wife are bound by community expectation as he describes their courtship -

The courtship between Zachariah and the lady who became his wife had been short, for there could be no mistake, as they had known one another so long. 112

- their marriage is a result of Puritanism's ignorance of the emotions, of a complacent "popular wisdom" in the chapel world. The Puritan inheritance, that is, for all its intellectuality and political radicalism, remains stultifying in terms of personal life, and to be in the tradition is to be unaware of vast areas of human society and personality. Even in terms of the intellect and politics, the tradition is enfeebled; "moderate Calvinism" is for White intellectual incoherence, and Coleman's radicalism is merely notional -

although he was a Democrat, (he) had never seen the world. He belonged to a religious sect. He believed in the people, it is true, but it was a people of Cromwellian Independents. 113

It is plain that if there is to be any vigour in Coleman's "radicalism" it must be injected from outside; White is careful to note that Coleman's religious tradition compels him to think in essentially aristocratic terms of separation, covenant, rather than in communal terms.

Coleman's introduction to the conspiratorial world of active political radicalism comes, therefore, as a complete shock to him and to his understanding of life. Although the Red Lion Friends of the People are badly imagined by Hale White - the group possesses no radical energy except as guided and patronized by the (unconvincing) Major Maitland - the impact of new outlooks and relationships is tellingly portrayed within the Coleman marriage. Already, before the meeting with Major Maitland, the marriage is fragile; Mrs. Coleman's obsessive orderliness, her self-repression, are briefly and economically noted, and both are powerfully presented when her husband's return home after the attack on him offers the possibility of "mess and confusion":

"Mrs. Coleman was irritated. The first emotion was not sympathy." 114

Consciously, Coleman realizes that the marriage is a disaster, that "his chance had come and had gone"; "he was paralysed, dead in half of his soul."¹¹⁵ But for Mrs. Coleman there is no full realization - just a sense of delight, as the narrative proceeds, in the company of the Major - a symptom of her own unfulfillment. And it is clear that the separation between the Colemans increases as time goes on, and Zachariah's world broadens. The marital home remains a place of tension, and religious separation images a full separation of soul:

... he let her go; she knelt down by her bed, prayed her prayer to her God, and in five minutes was asleep. Zachariah ten minutes afterwards prayed his prayer to his God, and lay down, but not to sleep ...¹¹⁶

Just beneath the surface here, and running fully through the account of the marriage, is the effect of sexual repression - an authentic aspect of Puritan tradition.

It is through Pauline Caillaud that Coleman is first awakened to sexuality, and the fact of her French upbringing is important, as she carries with her essentially un-English impulses. Despite White's ironic and dismissive remarks at the beginning of Chapter 3 about "French character", Pauline's self-expressive, unrepressed vitality is a revelation to Coleman, particularly in her dancing:

a series of graceful evolutions ... designed apparently to show the capacity of a beautiful figure for poetic expression ...¹¹⁷

... she ... displayed herself in the most exquisitely graceful attitudes, never once overstepping the mark, and yet showing every limb and line to the utmost advantage.¹¹⁸

That the narrator is himself uncertain about all this is clear - the slightly heavy awkwardness of tone, the careful reservation about "not overstepping the mark" are signs of his dominant Puritanism - but what is most important is the troubling effect on Zachariah. Is this not the work of the Devil? The question forces itself, but no simple answer is forthcoming. And what is at first a revelation of

the unexperienced becomes next for Coleman a modification of sensibility and then a fundamental challenge to his religion. Pauline's apt quotation - "C'est moi, l'Eternel, qui fais toutes les choses la" ⁽¹⁹⁾ - forces upon Coleman a whole revaluation of his stance: and eventually the Puritanism which insisted on separation and repression is dissolved, accepting the unity of experience and the notion of God as a creative force rather than as an inscrutable judge. Coleman's horizons are widened - by the opening of his imagination under the influence of Byron, by his discovery of sexuality, by his involvement in a popular movement - but his Calvinism is not easily dislodged: it has been, after all, his context and has established his identity. Hale White dramatizes this with considerable force in Chapter 6; Coleman's growing attachment to his new friends has prompted the prayer "that these men could be brought into the Church of Christ", ⁽²⁰⁾ and at the Sunday afternoon tea arranged to further this intention, Coleman preaches his gospel -

How clear it all seemed to him, how indisputable!
Childish association and years of unquestioning repetition
gave an absolute certainty to what was almost unmeaning
to other people. ⁽²¹⁾

The scene is effectively managed. What happens, of course, is not the conversion of the Caillauds and Major Maitland; instead, Coleman realizes that his gospel of salvation will no longer do - that human fellowship is more real to him than the "Church of Christ":

The man rose up behind the Calvinist, and reached out arms
to teach and embrace his friends. ⁽²²⁾

Hale White's commentary on this scene makes explicit his own understanding of religious decline. He looks back to the mid-seventeenth century, when Puritanism had both full conviction and inner coherence. Then, perhaps, Coleman could have urged his case; but now " ... he was at least a century and a half too late ...":

The system was still the same, even to its smallest details, but the application had become difficult Phrases had been invented or discovered which served to express modern hesitation to bring the accepted doctrine into actual, direct, week-day practice. It was in that way that it was gradually bled into impotence. 123

What is here expressed as a theory is effectively enacted in the fiction; in Coleman's personal life, and later in the provincial, dissenting world of Cowfold, the gradual decay of a religious tradition into impotence is tellingly portrayed. But the second half of the novel has a greater fictional convincingness, as if Hale White is more fully at home in his account of Tanner's Lane than he is in the world of radical politics.

An indication of this is the way in which, as soon as the scene moves to Cowfold, there is a far closer and more exact delineation of place. Cowfold is described in a detail Hale White nowhere uses of London or Manchester, and, in particular, the chapels are presented with great care - more than was given to "the meeting house at Hackney":

There were three chapels; one the chapel, orthodox, Independent, holding about seven hundred persons ...; the second Wesleyan, new, stuccoed, with grained doors and cast-iron railing; the third, strict Baptist, ultra-Calvinistic, Antinomian, according to the other sects, dark, down an alley, mean, surrounded by a small long-grassed graveyard, and named ZOAR in large letters over the long window in front. 124

And this careful physical description is an indication of the social and spiritual differences shortly to be expounded: Hale White knows Cowfold, and the subtle interconnections of its political, social and spiritual life. He also knows its prejudices of class and gradation, and takes a particular delight in chronicling its daily life. Cowfold thus lives in the pages of the Revolution, a token of the greater distance that Hale White is now able to achieve from his work; it is something akin to the keen sociological observation of Mrs. Oliphant, but with a far greater power than hers of being able to comprehend - and convey - processes of inward, personal change.

Cowfold's isolation in the 1840's from the larger world of events and ideas does not, for Hale White, mean that its religion is somehow immune to change. Though he notes exactly of Mr. Broad that "He could not doubt, for there was no doubt in the air",¹²⁵ he is equally aware that "he could not believe as Horden believed, for neither was Horden's belief now in the air."¹²⁶ Cowfold is isolated from the "world"; and theological winds have not yet begun to blow cold, but from within there is the necessity of change. And in Cowfold, religious change is decline. Hale White notes the continuing power of sabbatarianism - the pump is invariably chained up on Sundays - but also remarks that the "went nowhere" class dig their gardens and stroll through the meadows;¹²⁷ outward observance is a part of Cowfold, but a considerable portion of the population have no part in religious worship. And among those who do take part, numbers are falling. In Zoar, for instance, there is a baptism "once in every three or four years", and

The children of the congregation, as a rule, fell away from it as they grew up ...¹²⁸

In the Tanner's Lane congregation there has been little apparent change: but White notes a decline in religious vitality -

The fervid piety of Cowper's time and of the Evangelical revival was a thing almost of the past.¹²⁹

- a decline which is imaged in the passing generations of ministers: Horden is succeeded by Broad, whose vocation is simply social - he "was brought up to the trade as a youth; got tired of it, thought he might do something more respectable"¹³⁰ - and the Broads imagine that their own Thomas will succeed his father, by the exertion of reasonable influence. As it is presented here, Tanner's Lane is moving steadily towards spiritual bankruptcy.

But this movement does not take place unopposed: Hale White portrays Tanner's Lane as a focus for intense conflict between different aspects of the Independent tradition, embodied in the Broad and Allen

families. The Allens are Dissenters, but their inheritance has been enriched by what White refers to as "literary leaven";¹³¹ he observes justly how personal friendship - in this case with Zachariah Coleman - can enlarge cultural horizons, and notes that the difference observed by Broad in the Allens - "questionable members of the flock"¹³² - is due to Scott and Byron. Their imaginations, that is, have been nourished in an un-Calvinist way. And yet it seems at first that they are themselves content within Independency as Cowfold offers it, and Hale White offers a sociological comment:

It may seem strange that the deacon of a Dissenting Chapel and his wife could read (Byron), and could continue to wait upon the ministrations of the Reverend John Broad; but I am only stating a fact. ¹³³

Hale White makes this credible; the two families are convincing versions of the effect of a religious tradition, modified and unmodified by outside influences. The Allens' political radicalism, is a product of the Cromwellian impulse of principled dissent - both religious and political - and the revitalising impact of Byronic radical romanticism; the Broads, on the other hand, inherit only an enfeebled tradition, unregenerated by further idealism. In the Broads, the political fervour of early Independency, has declined to a calculating pragmatism. And although Hale White overdraws Thomas Broad's lust and hypocrisy, his distance from a genuine religion of the heart - such as Mr. Bradshaw still preaches at Pike Street Chapel - is convincing. That the two families eventually cannot remain members of the same community is clear - the fundamental differences are bound to lead, eventually, to conflict, as Hale White observes:

... the hatred of a person like Thomas Broad to a person like George Allen needs no explanation. ¹³⁴

And, of course, a marriage is doomed to failure - only for a time can Allens and Broads keep company within a chapel: essentially they are citizens of different worlds.

The "Revolution" itself is a very insignificant business, in one sense. Change happens, but Hale White is curiously ambivalent about its effect. The seceders from the chapel, under Mr. Allen's guidance, have set up a meeting of almost apostolic simplicity -

Each of them in turn making some attempt at an exposition of the Bible and a short address... 135

- and are instrumental in the appointment of another minister. But there are uneasy hints in Hale White's presentation of this new minister; he preaches with "fluent self-confidence",¹³⁶ rebuilds the meeting house, installs an organ, lectures on secular subjects, and becomes an amateur archeologist. It is all a little too successful. Hale White implies that the fundamental trend of decline is irreversible; for a time it can be checked, but what happens in Tanner's Lane is not radical enough to be a profound revolution.

But there is another "revolution" - which Hale White attempts to portray: the religious change in George Allen. Institutional religion's "revolution" may not be profound, but within an individual, suggests the author, there may be a conversion so effective that it does revolutionize the personal life. The fictional weakness here is Hale White's recommendation; having presented religious processes of change in Zachariah with effect, he goes on to attempt George's movement from Independency to a kind of detached stoicism under Zachariah's influence: and it does not work. There is an over-insistence on Hale White's part which invalidates the supposed "conversion":

Zachariah bent his head near him and gently expounded the texts. As the exposition grew George's heart dilated, and he was carried beyond his troubles. It was the birth in him - even in him, a Cowfold ironmonger, not a scholar by any means, - of what philosophers call the idea, that Incarnation which has ever been our Redemption. 137

The unctuous tone here - "gently expounded ...", "even in him" - betrays the writer: urging the consolation of philosophy on George

is just inappropriate. A similar notion, however, expressed by Zachariah's daughter, Pauline, has more force -

"The highest form of martyrdom, ..., is not even living for the sake of a cause, but living without one, merely because it is your duty to live. " 138

Here, the aphorism can be felt as Pauline's, not just Hale White's: there is fictional validity in the moment. But George's "conversion" and his later response to his wife's death remain ineffective. The latter moment shows Hale White again using both interior and exterior narration. When George imagines his wife in the grave, there is a genuine evocation of horror:

He thought of her lying in her grave - she whom he had caressed - of what was going on down there, under the turf, and he feared he should go mad. Where was she? ... He did not know ... 139

But the point, just a page later, where Hale White presents George as being "healed by nature", has a perfunctoriness which invalidates. George is being used, simply, as an illustration of a generalized "philosophical" point:

There is one religious teacher ... which seldom fails those who are in health, and, at last, did not fail him Nature helped him, the beneficent Power which heals the burn or scar and covers it with new skin. 140

The brief but powerful note of physical horror is turned aside by a bland notion of nature as a "beneficent Power": and here Hale White seems to have lost his awareness of the full ambivalence of existence - a simple, "comforting" formula settles all questions.

While, therefore, it remains an important part of Hale White's fictional exploration of declining Dissent, The Revolution in Tanner's Lane is weakened by attempted authorial recommendation. The two earlier novels are more remarkable both for their inwardness and their objectivity: the reader enters into Mark Rutherford's own experience with greater immediacy than into the life of Coleman or George Allen,

while there is at the same time a greater distance between the writer and his fiction in the Autobiography and Deliverance.

In the later fiction, Hale White's attention is no longer concentrated on the world of Dissent, but he continues to explore the questions of identity and relationship. His central characters, from Miriam's Schooling onwards, are formed not in the Puritan tradition but in other, less insistently religious, contexts; and White is looking, it seems, for alternatives to the religious community. As it appears in these final novels, the religious tradition is unable to nourish a responsible morality or a genuine spirituality; and where these do exist, they are found in exceptional individuals rather than in social groups.

The Cowfold of Miriam's Schooling exemplifies the fictional milieu of the later novels. It is a place where religion as a communal, shared experience is not felt as present, where the nullity of formal religious observance is assumed: "Miriam", notes Hale White, "had no religion, though she listened to a sermon every Sunday."¹⁴⁰ And when genuine religion does appear, in Miss Tippit, it has no social dimension - she attends church, but is careful to seek seclusion there "in the corner by the wall."¹⁴¹ Equally, when Miriam herself undergoes a kind of "conversion" experience, it is outside a communal context, and Hale White's narrative abruptness makes it unconvincing - there is so little preparation for Miriam's sense of "her own nothingness and the nothingness of man"¹⁴² and her subsequent conviction that "she must do something for her fellow creatures".¹⁴³ There is, in this novella, too much insistence on the philosophical "message" Hale White wishes to convey. Only at one point does the fiction have full conviction, when Miriam and her husband discover a more profound relationship through their common enthusiasm for astronomy. By moving away from the chapel world and the chapel psychology, that is, the writer has at first left himself without a sufficiently known area of experience.

In Catherine Furze, too, there is a lack of sustained fictional intensity, again perhaps attributable to the novel's lack of rootedness in the Dissenting world. There is some effective sociological observation of church and chapel, but no attempt at the portrayal of a puritan consciousness; though the novel shows Hale White preoccupied with puritan themes of restraint and impulse, salvation and renunciation. In the Furze family White offers a careful study of the social use of religious affiliation, noting how the chapel can be a source of social respectability rather than a living, shared context: the definition of a corrupted tradition is part of the portrait:

(Furze) was a most respectable member of a Dissenting congregation, but he was not a member of the church, and was never seen at the week-night services or the prayer-meetings. He went through the ceremony of family worship morning and evening, but he did not pray extempore, as did the elect The days were over for Eastthorpe when a man like Mr. Furze could be denounced, a man who payed his pew-rent regularly Mr. Jennings therefore called on him, and religion was not mentioned. 144

Mrs. Furze, whose social aspiration observes the convenience of exchanging the chapel for the church, cannot grasp the notion of community; respectability in her is constantly an impulse towards separation - and there are echoes of Phoebe, Junior as she constantly works to sever Catherine from family roots. Moving house, which for Mrs. Furze is simply a way of changing her "connection", is however for Furze himself a more disturbing idea; if his religion is superficial, his sense of place is more central to his identity:

In the big front bedroom his father and he had been born. The first thing he could remember was having measles there.... In that room his father had died He did not relish the thought of taking down the old four-post bedstead and putting rakes and shovels in its place ... 145

In the event, the disruption of the Furze household is complete - aspiration defeats sentimental attachment. But if the Furze impulse towards self-improvement - a debased Puritan legacy - is one aspect of Catherine's world, another, quite un-puritanical, is the Chapel Farm.

In the presentation of Catherine's dislocation between these two environments there is some effective writing: Easthorpe's ideas of respectability and self-repression are well set against the Chapel Farm's emphasis on spontaneity and creative sexuality. But it is part of Hale White's continuing bondage to Calvinist preoccupations that despite the force of her presented sexuality, Catherine's "salvation" in the novel is connected specifically with sexual repression: the author's distrust of impulse is unmistakeable, unless it is the impulse of "self-control".

The novel's concern with salvation is clear, but the attempted solutions are unachieved. Cardew is an unconvincing clergyman, and what he means by his remark to Catherine - "you have saved me" ¹⁴⁶ - is uncertain. It is as if Hale White is working so hard to impose rather austere puritan solutions that the inherence of the novel's final impact evades him: impulse, responsiveness and sexuality are fictionally endorsed, but authorially rejected. The writer's own continuing Puritanism is decisive.

All this, as I have suggested, is far from the area of Hale White's greatest strength; but Catherine Furze does contain, in the account of Phoebe Crowhurst's burial place, an effective picture - and symbol - of a disappearing Dissent:

Half a mile beyond the cottage was a chapel. It stood at a crossroad, and no houses were near it. It had stood there for 150 years, gabled, red brick, and why it was put there nobody knew. Round it were tombstones, many totally disfigured, and most of them awry. The grass was always long and rank, full of dandelions, sorrel, and docks ...

Crowhursts had been buried at Cross Lanes ever since it existed, but the present Crowhursts knew nothing of their ancestors beyond the generation immediately preceding ...

(Phoebe) lies at the back of the meeting-house, amongst her kindred, and a little mound was raised over her. Her father borrowed the key of the gate every now and then, and ... cut the grass where his child lay, and prevented the weeds from encroaching; but when he died, not long after, his wife had to go into the workhouse, and in one season the sorrel and dandelions took possession ... 147

The elegiac note is appropriate not only to Phoebe but also to Cross Lanes itself. Whatever might once have been its vitality as a living community, it now remains simply as a burial plot. And it is interesting that this is the last chapel to appear in Hale White's fiction; it is not fanciful, I think, to notice that in the series of novels it stands for an irreversible decline in religious activity, its origins, its human significance, lost and unsearched for. Hale White more than any other contemporary is alive to the decline and fall of Dissent, and Cross Lanes is an apt symbol of this achievement.

In his final novel, Clara Hopgood, Hale White moves decisively and remarkably away from Dissent. The Hopgood family inhabit a world far removed from any religious tradition, and their separation from religion is seen as the source of their moral strength and freedom. There is here no repression or self-distrust - the telling signs of a puritan inheritance - and no idea of salvation being achieved by self-restraint. Instead, the Hopgood sisters are, each in her own way, positive and guilt-free in their approach to life; and Hale White is careful to specify that their education and upbringing have been responsible for their unusual freedom from conventional ideas. Their father's open and unrepresive way of dealing with children is noted, ironically, as "peculiar" -

He talked to them and made them talk to him, and whatever they read was translated into speech; thought in his home was vocal 148

- and it is deliberately contrasted with the methods of Madge's boarding school where Evangelical religion and social hypocrisy go hand in hand.

Hale White offers in Madge Hopgood a new valuation of sexuality, where impulse and responsiveness are accepted without authorial reservation, and his handling of the love scene and of Madge's subsequent decision not to marry Frank is, for him, startling in its

endorsement of moral unconventionality. There is now no question of sexuality being seen as "sinful", of "salvation" being sought in escape from it. Madge Hopgood is, in effect, a repudiation of all the sexual timidity to be seen in Catherine Furze and in other characters right back to Mark Rutherford himself. Madge's moral integrity, her bold and open decisiveness, stand clearer by comparison with Frank's moral cowardice. In his portrait of Frank, Hale White deliberately links disingenuousness with a decaying liberal religion; Frank's religious background is satirically sketched:

He was surrounded by every impulse which was pure and noble Mr. Maurice and Mr. Sterling were his father's guests, and hence it may be inferred that there was an altar in the house, and that the sacred flame burnt thereon... 149

It is a clear rejection of "progressive" religion - there is no talk of a new or purified Christianity, as at one point in The Deliverance - as if Hale White is now only interested in a firm and independent morality, one which is separate from all religious traditions. For the novel affirms wholeness, openness, self-giving and moral courage, and these are specifically the products of a non-religious context.

Yet Clara Hopgood does find room for spiritual experience, and Hale White endorses as valid the religious motivations - felt as supernaturally-prompted - of Mrs. Hopgood, Clara and Cohen. Clara has a decisive "vision" and the Lord's Prayer is for her a genuine expression of religious conviction and trust; while Baruch Cohen's belief in God, or "one", is seen as formative in his whole outlook. While finally dismissing religious tradition, that is, as a communally -shared experience, Hale White in his last novel presents solitary prayer as a personal reality. There is room for personal faith in a world where religious traditions have decayed and died. Cohen seems to articulate White's convictions - the religious world is defunct, but

meaning may be discovered through the transcendent and transforming power of relationships between persons:

It is possible here in London for one atom to be of eternal importance to another the core of religion is the relationship of the individual to the whole, the faith that the poorest and meanest of us is a person ... 150

Hale White's novels take the reader to the heart of the Puritan experience. He renders with disturbing power the inner conflicts and tensions created by Calvinism, and equally the disintegration involved in severance from the tradition. While himself rejecting the world of Independency, he is unrivalled in his presentation of it, - from within; and religious questions of identity and fellowship remain central to his concern throughout. But, as I have tried to show, his own experiences of religion leave a profound impression in the fiction, and it is perhaps only in the final novel that he breaks free from puritan preoccupations. Both the importance and the inadequacies of the chapel world are conveyed, and it is seen as a dying context; one in which contradictions between a "gospel" of love and an experienced separation from others are destructive. Creative change is not seen as a possibility - the chapel world can only die, bled to impotence by its inner inconsistencies.

Hale White, then, offers a distinctive study of secularization, and his portrait of the chapel world is very much the end of a line. The dissolution of "faith in community" which he presents belongs to a particular moment, the point at which the wholesale decline of religious observance began. He captures the passing of communal faith in one particular tradition, and ends a line of writers to whom the religious experience is of great significance in personal life; no later novelist of importance could in the same way take the community of belief seriously. With Hale White, religion as a decisive, shared experience departs the English novel.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 5.

1. see, for example, Basil Willey, More Nineteenth Century Studies; Wilfred Stone, Religion and Art of William Hale White, (Stanford: Univ., Calif. Press 1954).
2. Catherine M. Maclean, Mark Rutherford (London: Macdonald, 1955) p. 54, footnote.
3. W. Hale White, The Early Life of Mark Rutherford (London: O.U.P., 1913) p. 16. (hereafter, Early Life)
4. Early Life, p. 46.
5. " " p. 46-7.
6. " " p. 18.
7. " " p. 59.
8. " " p. 12.
9. " " p. 43.
10. " " pp. 45, 53.
11. " " p. 45.
12. " " p. 17.
13. Albert Peel, Those Hundred Years (London: Congregational Union, 1931) p. 27.
14. R.W. Dale, A History of English Congregationalism, (London: 1907) p. 588.
15. *ibid.*
16. Peel, p. 75.
17. W. Hale White, Letters to Three Friends, (London: O.U.P. 1924) p. 160-161. (hereafter, Letters)
18. see The Nonconformist Vol XII 1852; letters in the editions of 31.3.1852, 14.7.1852, 15.9.1852. See also Early Life, pp 63-78.
19. Early Life, p. 64.
20. W. Hale White, Peter Bulkley in Last Pages from a Journal (London: O.U.P. 1915) p. 200. (hereafter, Last Pages)
21. Last Pages, p. 203.
22. " " p. 205.
23. W. Hale White, John Bunyan, (London: Hodder, 1905) p. 20. (hereafter, Bunyan)
24. Bunyan, p. 94.
25. " p. 145.

26. Bunyan, p. 246.
27. Early Life, p. 37.
28. W. Hale White, Pages from a Journal (London: O.U.P., 1910) p. 8-9. (hereafter, Pages)
29. v. Letters, pp. 67, 84.
30. Letters, p. 222.
31. " p. 223.
32. Last Pages, p. 245.
33. Early Life, p. 59.
34. " " p. 62.
35. ibid.
36. W. Hale White, More Pages from a Journal (London: O.U.P. 1910) p. 159. (hereafter, More Pages)
37. More Pages, p. 170.
38. Pages, p. 40.
39. " p. 38-39.
40. " p. 58.
41. Letters, p. 7.
42. " p. 237.
43. Maclean p. 288, quoting an otherwise unpublished letter of W. Hale White.
44. W. Hale White, An Argument for the Extension of the Franchise (London: 1866) p. 12.
45. Autobiography, ch. 9.
46. " Introductory Poem.
47. " Preface.
48. " Postscript.
49. " ch. 2.
50. " ch. 1.
51. ibid.
52. ibid.
53. ibid.
54. Autobiography, ch. 1.

55. *ibid.*
56. Autobiography, ch. 2.
57. *ibid.*
58. *ibid.*
59. Autobiography, ch. 3.
60. *ibid.*
61. *ibid.*
62. Autobiography, ch. 5.
63. " ch. 3.
64. " ch. 4.
65. *ibid.*
66. Autobiography, ch. 5.
67. " ch. 7.
68. *ibid.*
69. *ibid.*
70. see John 4¹¹; Acts 2³.
71. Autobiography, ch. 7.
72. *ibid.*
73. Autobiography, ch. 8.
74. " ch. 7.
75. *ibid.*
76. Autobiography, ch. 1.
77. " ch. 9.
78. " ch. 1.
79. " ch. 9.
80. Deliverance, ch. 1.
81. *ibid.*
82. *ibid.*
83. *ibid.*
84. *ibid.*
85. Autobiography, ch. 8.

86. Deliverance, ch. 1.
87. " ch. 2.
88. ibid.
89. ibid.
90. Deliverance, ch. 2.
91. " ch. 1.
92. ibid.
93. Deliverance, ch. 2.
94. ibid.
95. Deliverance, ch. 5.
96. ibid.
97. ibid.
98. Deliverance, ch. 6.
99. " ch. 7.
100. ibid.
101. ibid.
102. ibid.
103. Deliverance, ch. 8.
104. ibid.
105. ibid.
106. Deliverance, ch. 6.
107. W. Hale White, Notes on the Book of Job in Deliverance.
108. The Revolution in Tanner's Lane (hereafter Revolution) ch. 2.
109. Revolution, ch. 1.
110. ibid.
111. ibid.
112. ibid.
113. Revolution, ch. 2.
114. " ch. 1.
115. ibid.
116. Revolution, ch. 3.

117. Revolution, ch. 5.
118. " ch. 11.
119. " ch. 5. (i.e. Isaiah 45⁷)
120. " ch. 5.
121. " ch. 6.
122. *ibid.*
123. *ibid.*
124. Revolution, ch. 16.
125. " ch. 17.
126. *ibid.*
127. Revolution, ch. 16.
128. *ibid.*
129. Revolution, ch. 17.
130. *ibid.*
131. Revolution, ch. 19.
132. *ibid.*
133. *ibid.*
134. Revolution, ch. 24.
135. " ch. 27.
136. *ibid.*
137. Revolution, ch. 24.
138. *ibid.*
139. Revolution, ch. 26.
140. Miriam's Schooling, p. 62. (page references to the 6th edn. of T. Fisher Unwin, n.d.).
141. Miriam's Schooling, p. 78.
142. " " p. 116.
143. " " p. 117.
144. Catherine Furze, ch. 2.
145. *ibid.*
146. Catherine Furze, ch. 7.

147. Catherine Furze, ch. 16.

148. Clara Horgood, ch. 1.

149. " " ch. 4.

150. " " chs. 24, 28.

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